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ABSTRACT

Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning held the second of a proposed series of three roundtables on student diversity in November 1999. Three commissioned papers prepared by national experts were the basis for activities at the roundtable. Focusing on the unique needs of at-risk students, the papers detail current research and effective practices. They also challenge the reader to reflect on current policies and practices relative to the inclusion of at-risk students in the standards reform movement. This publication includes the commissioned papers and a summary of the roundtable proceedings. The papers are: (1) "Improving the Achievement of Marginalized Students of Color" (Geneva Gay); (2) "Immigrant Students and Standards-Based Reform: Examining Opportunities To Learn" (Pam McCollum); and (3) "The School District's Role in Helping High-Poverty Schools Become High Performing" (Douglas Mac Iver and Robert Balfanz). Each paper contains references. (SLD)

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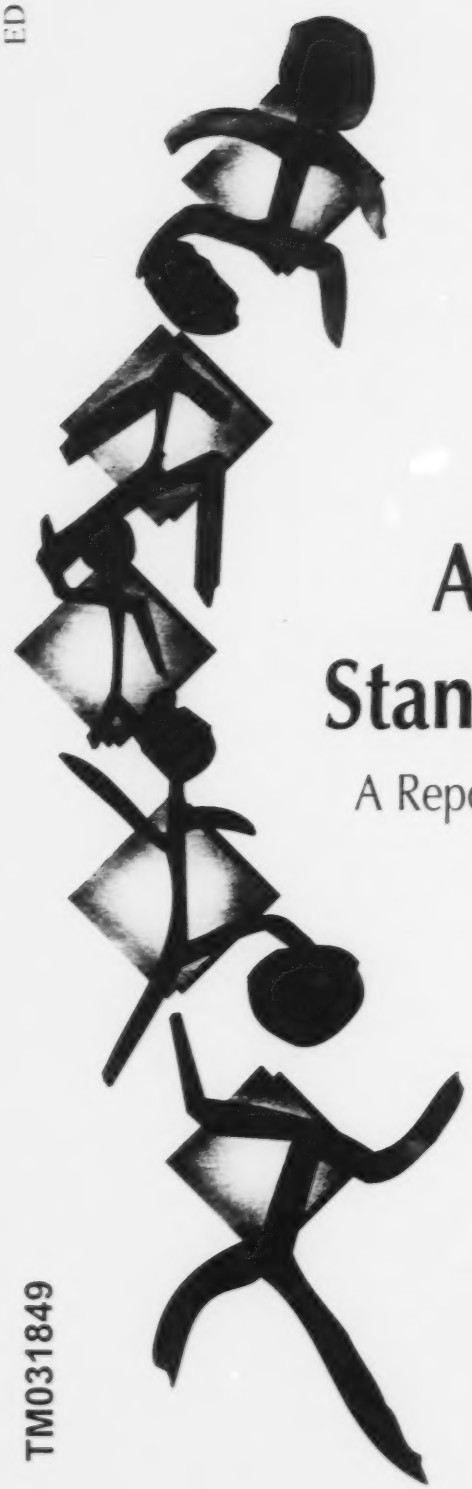

Including At-Risk Students in Standards-Based Reform:

A Report on McREL's Diversity Roundtable II

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May, 2000

Dear Colleague:

Our nation's schools and classrooms have become increasingly diverse with a variety of students who are at-risk of completing school. As educators across the country align their practices with standards-based reform, they are faced with the challenging task of including these students in that reform. It is a daunting task. It is also a critical one since as a nation we have an obligation to develop the skills and talents of every young person who enters the classroom.

As part of McREL's leadership role in the area of curriculum, learning and instruction, the laboratory proposed to conduct a series of three Diversity Roundtables addressing the issues central to including diverse student populations in standards-based reform. The second of these roundtables targeting at-risk student populations was held in November, 1999.

Three commissioned papers prepared by national experts were the basis for the activities at the roundtable. Focusing on the unique needs of at-risk students, the papers detail current research and effective practices. They also challenge the reader to reflect on current policies and practices relative to the inclusion of at-risk students in the standards reform movement. This publication includes the commissioned papers and a summary of the Roundtable proceedings.

It is our intent that this publication serve as a catalyst for reflection and discussion regarding educational policies and practices affecting at-risk students. We hope you find this resource beneficial as you face the challenge of developing the talents and skills of *all* children.

Sincerely,

Tim Waters
President and Executive Director

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This publication would not have been possible without the dedicated efforts of many individuals. Deep appreciation is extended to each of the writers. Their knowledge of the research findings and effective practices for at-risk populations has helped to provide educators with the knowledge and information they need to include these students in standards-based reform efforts. Sincere thanks also go to the members of the planning committee, who provided the vision and guidance for the design and planning of the roundtable and this publication.

In the spirit of interagency collaboration, we also would like to acknowledge contributions made by the staff of the Region IX Comprehensive Center at McREL, the Eisenhower High Plains Consortium for Mathematics and Science at McREL, the Colorado Department of Education, and the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) in the quality assurance review process.

Thanks also go to McREL staff members and others who contributed to this publication. Special thanks are extended to Lou Cicchinelli, Ceri Dean, Nilda Garcia Simms, Alice Krueger, Cindy Wakefield, and Audrey Peralez for their support, helpful suggestions, and dedicated efforts; Barbara Gaddy for her editing expertise; Linda Brannan for her assistance with the references; and Kathleen McFarland, Marla Fultz, Michele Stegall, Cathy Warner, and Lynn Bishop for administrative support.

Finally, we would like to express our great appreciation and gratitude to all the participants who attended the roundtable for their presence, their dedication to at-risk students, and their timeless efforts to ensure the inclusion of these populations in standards-based reform.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface iii

Chapter One: Introduction 1

Chapter Two: Improving the Achievement of Marginalized Students of Color
by Geneva Gay, Ph.D. 3

Chapter Three: Immigrant Students and Standards-Based Reform: Examining Opportunities to Learn
by Pam McCollum, Ph.D. 20

Chapter Four: The School District's Role in Helping High-Poverty Schools Become High Performing
by Douglas Mac Iver, Ph.D., and Robert Balfanz, Ph.D. 35

Chapter Five: Conclusion 70

PREFACE

This document is a compilation of the three research-based papers that served as a catalyst for discussions at the second Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) diversity roundtable, held November 11–12, 1999 in Aurora, Colorado. This publication will be distributed to the 55 roundtable participants to reinforce the essential points of the presentations and discussions. It is our hope that this document will serve as a catalyst for further thought about these issues, provide a means to begin discussions among colleagues, and stimulate changes in practice and policy that translate into improved learning for at-risk students.

This publication also will be distributed to key individuals in the seven-state region served by McREL (Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming) through its contract with the U.S. Department of Education, including chief state school officers, appropriate staff at state departments of education, intermediate service agencies, and other federally funded service providers. It will also be available on McREL's Web site (http://www.mcrel.org) and mailed to anyone who requests a copy. For readers other than roundtable participants, the document can serve as an introduction to the issues related to at-risk students in standards-based reform and as a resource for effective strategies in addressing at-risk students' needs, whether indirectly through professional development or directly through instructional strategies. We hope that readers seriously consider and use the suggested practices presented in the various papers. Furthermore, we hope that this document inspires readers to study this topic further.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document has five chapters: an introduction; three research-based papers, which were commissioned for the roundtable; and a conclusion. Chapter One sets the tone by highlighting the increasing diversity that characterizes our nation, our communities, and our schools. This chapter also briefly describes the process of designing the roundtables and the goals that were identified by the members of the roundtable planning committee.

Chapters Two through Four are the papers presented at the November 1999 roundtable. Although all of the papers address standards-based reform and the implications for at-risk students, each of the writers approaches the topic from a different perspective and each focuses on a different population. Consequently, the authors' use of terms describing at-risk populations differs. For example, in Chapter Two, the author offers comments and strategies for working with *marginalized students of color*; in Chapter Three, the author focuses primarily on *secondary-level, recent-immigrant students*. These terms—and others—refer to students who are at-risk for failure.

In their discussions regarding the implications of standards-based reform for at-risk students, the writers raise our awareness about the issues challenging these students. They also provide suggestions and models for helping teachers acquire the necessary information and skills to improve instruction for these students.

In Chapter Two, Dr. Geneva Gay provokes our thinking when she argues that the way to improve the achievement of marginalized students of color is to change classroom instruction. Dr. Gay offers a number of strategies for better engaging students in meaningful classroom activities and for making students' learning experiences more ethnically and culturally relevant. She also makes a strong case for expanding the capacity of individual teachers to create learning environments that better serve marginalized students of color.

In Chapter Three, Dr. Pam McCollum argues that schools adopting a standards-based approach must establish opportunity-to-learn standards for all students, especially those students who are at-risk for failure. Her paper focuses on effective instruction for secondary-level, recent-immigrant students. McCollum provides a brief overview of immigrant education discusses, key legal cases that guarantee immigrants' rights to a free public education, and argues for the need for opportunity-to-learn standards. Selected stories of successful programs for recent-immigrant Mexican students are shared to illustrate how providing these students with appropriate opportunities to learn increased their chances of success.

In Chapter Four, Dr. Douglas Mac Iver and Dr. Robert Balfanz offer guidelines for educators who want to take an active role in promoting and sustaining high-performing schools. The authors examine the small body of literature that explores the role of the school district in developing, promoting, and sustaining high-performing schools. The final section draws on this critique and the authors' experience with the Talent Development Project to offer suggestions concerning the role school districts can play in helping all students achieve. In particular, the authors propose that five-way partnerships be developed among schools, school districts, external design teams, local reform organizations, and foundations as one mechanism through which systematic gains in academic achievement can be realized.

Each paper concludes with a set of questions that can be used to guide the development of teaching, administrative, and organizational practices that support the achievement of at-risk students. These questions may be particularly helpful in a number of ways. For example, they might be used to focus discussions about ways in which to serve at-risk students—whether through newsletters, informal discussions, or in faculty meetings, parent/community meetings, or teacher study groups.

Chapter Five pulls together the issues raised in the papers and through the roundtable discussions. This concluding chapter presents five major areas in which educators can initiate or strengthen actions to improve the education of at-risk students.

Taken together, the papers and the conclusion raise awareness about issues at-risk students face and provide guidelines for improving instruction for these students. By following the specific suggestions in the papers and the conclusion, educators can better meet the needs of at-risk students and, thus, help them achieve greater academic and personal success.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The primary focus of the standards-based reform movement is increasing the academic achievement of *all* students. Yet today, one of the greatest challenges encountered by low-performing schools is helping students at-risk for failure to meet challenging standards. Although much progress has been made in the area of standards-based reform for mainstream students, as Dr. McCollum reminds us in her paper, "no explicit guidance is offered about how to help different groups of students, including those at-risk for failure, meet these standards" (p. 20).

The U.S. Department of Education estimates that at-risk students make up anywhere from 20-40 percent of the student population (see Improving Possibilities for Students Placed at-Risk, http://www.ed.gov/bulletin/winter1994/atrisk.html.) There is great diversity among this student population. There are differences in ethnic backgrounds, languages, and learning styles, social and economic conditions. In addition, this student population is represented in every region of the country. However, in spite of all these differences, these students face some common obstacles that characterize them as at-risk. According to the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), a student is considered to be at-risk if he or she is a member of any of the following groups: children who live in high-poverty areas; children who are Limited English Proficient (LEP); migratory children; neglected or delinquent children; homeless children; immigrant children; American Indian children; children with disabilities; refugee children; and teen parents.

Finding the most effective and most appropriate ways to reach at-risk students continues to be an obstacle to schools' realizing the vision of standards-based reform. Educators across the country—and, in particular, in the McREL seven-state region—have expressed the need for ideas, suggestions, and help in learning new skills to address the needs of these students.

In response to this need and as part of its leadership role in the area of curriculum, learning, and instruction, McREL has planned a series of three roundtables regarding the implications of standards-based education for diverse populations. These roundtables focus, respectively, on culturally and linguistically diverse populations, at-risk populations, and special needs populations.

At-Risk Roundtable Design

In keeping with McREL's collaborative approach to working with educators in the region, a roundtable planning committee comprised of practitioners and researchers from the region and across the country was convened. Members of the planning committee shared their perspectives about the needs of at-risk populations, assisted with the design of the At-Risk Roundtable, and made suggestions about possible areas of focus for the research papers. The following outcomes were identified for roundtable participants.

1. To become familiar with current research findings and effective practices for educating at-risk students.

2. To examine standards-based reform and its implications for at-risk students and the educators who work with them.

3. To identify strategies that will ensure and support the inclusion of at-risk students in standards-based reform.

McREL's At-Risk Roundtable was designed around research-based papers prepared specifically for the event by three national experts. The general sessions served as forums for the writers to present and discuss their papers. Each writer was given about 60 minutes to present his or her paper, highlight key points, and answer questions from the audience.

At the conclusion of each general session, participants met in small groups to network with other colleagues, discuss the concrete strategies suggested by the speaker that might ensure the inclusion of at-risk students in standards-based reform, and share personal experiences.

In the closing session, participants asked questions of the panel of presenters based on their small group conversations. Due to the informal nature of the small group discussions and the wrap-up session, no attempt was made to draw conclusions, obtain a consensus, or record these spontaneous sessions. Based on the positive reactions of participants to the closing session, we plan to incorporate a similar opportunity for interaction between presenters and participants into the September 2000 roundtable and will attempt to capture key points made during that.

CHAPTER TWO

IMPROVING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF MARGINALIZED STUDENTS OF COLOR

by

Geneva Gay, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the way to improve the achievement of marginalized students of color is to change classroom instruction, not to change students. A number of reform strategies are suggested that can be applied across subject areas and grades. These strategies are informed by the idea that teachers should be empowered to make their own instructional decisions. Teachers also should carefully analyze the teaching process to identify those dimensions that are most problematic for marginalized students and those that can best be modified so that information and perspectives about diverse cultures are integrated into classroom learning experiences. This discussion is followed by the identification of four dimensions of teaching that strongly affect student achievement, with accompanying explanations about how these dimensions can be changed to be more effective for students of color.

Dr. Geneva Gay is professor of education and associate of the Center for Multicultural Education at the University of Washington. She is the recipient of the Distinguished Scholar Award and the 1994 Multicultural Educator Award. Dr. Gay is nationally and internationally known for her scholarship in multicultural education, particularly as it relates to curriculum design, staff development, classroom instruction, and culture and learning. Her writings include more than 110 articles and book chapters, co-editorship of *Expressively Black: The Basis of Ethnic Identity*, and author of *At the Essence of Learning: Multicultural Education*.

INTRODUCTION

The marginalized students of primary concern in this paper are students of color, specifically under-achieving African, Asian, Latino, and Native Americans. The suggestions offered to improve their school performance stem from the following assumptions:

- School achievement means more than academics and intellectual development. Social, personal, cultural, moral, and political skills also are essential elements of achievement.
- State, national, and local standardized test scores are extremely inadequate indicators of what students know and can do.
- Virtually all students of color are "marginalized" and "at-risk" in some way in conventional U.S. schools, even those who appear to be succeeding academically.

1. Expecting curriculum reform to solve students' achievement problems represents misplaced responsibility and misjudged hope.

2. Instructional reform has a far greater potential for significantly improving the achievement of students of color than curriculum reform, particularly if it incorporates the cultural orientations and experiences of these students.

3. Comprehensive, sustained approaches to education reform and instruction for students of color are much more effective for improving achievement than incremental, sporadic efforts.

4. Education reforms that are not culturally relevant to ethnically diverse groups of students will produce minimal, if any, improvements in achievement.

5. Achievement in academic subjects and basic learning skills will increase when the impact of culture on learning is clearly understood and routinely incorporated into classroom instruction.

6. One aspect of achievement (e.g., academic) is more likely to be accomplished when all aspects of achievement (e.g., academic, social, personal) are developed simultaneously.

Consistent with these beliefs, the suggestions for improving the achievement of marginalized students of color that are offered in this paper focus on classroom instructional dynamics rather than curriculum content.

Confronting Common Beliefs and Practices

When teachers are challenged to use alternative instructional approaches with underachieving students of color, they commonly give one or both of the following responses: "Why lower standards for these students? Shouldn't all students be treated the same way?" or "Tell us what to do, and we will do it" The problem with the first response is that it reflects a significant misunderstanding about teaching ethnically and culturally diverse students. All too often, teachers equate using "alternative instructional approaches" with lowering expectations, which perpetuates the fallacy that treating all ethnically diverse students the same is a desirable way to teach. The problem with the second response is that no one can tell teachers *exactly* what to do with their *particular* students since effective teaching *is always specific* to the contextual and interactional dynamics of students and teachers in particular classrooms. The best that "outsiders" to these relationships can do is suggest possible directions to take and factors to consider as teachers seek out or develop alternative instructional strategies that might be more effective. But teachers must make the final choices for themselves. Good and Brophy (1978) make these points very clearly:

> Although it is not possible to specify how teachers should behave with complete detail, it is possible to note things that should occur regularly, and we can look for

> the presence or absence of these things. . . . We can say that certain things should take place, but the frequency of their occurrence and the ways they are performed depend in part upon teacher style and situational variables. These are just a few aspects of teaching that require teachers to act as *decision makers*, determining how general principles apply to their particular classrooms. (p. 341)

The role of context is an unavoidable reality. It cannot be ignored in the search for ways to improve the performance of underachieving students. Furthermore, catalog listings of multicultural instructional strategies and activities do not adequately explain how such techniques evolved or how teachers might use them to improve the quality of their pedagogical decision-making skills. Instead of helping teachers make quality instructional decisions that are appropriate for their particular students and circumstances, these lists may inadvertently perpetuate a sense of powerlessness, intimidation, and a lack of ownership.

Although specific instructional strategies for specific teachers and students cannot be precisely determined by outsiders, some "arenas of instructional reform" can be identified. These arenas, or areas of focus, involve three major types of tasks: the process of making instructional decisions; assessing the adequacy of decisions; and appropriately integrating new strategies for different students into the scope, sequence, and context of other classroom processes. (Berman, 1987). Therefore, in order to improve the performance of underachieving ethnically diverse students, teachers need to learn how to make decisions about what is best for their given place, time, and circumstances. This paper suggests some responses to this need.

The ideas presented in this paper are based on two key principles: (1) Students' educational experiences should be integrated with rich multicultural knowledge and experiences (*multicultural infusion)*; and (2) *culture, ethnicity, and education are inseparably linked.* This paper is also grounded in the idea that the most effective way to improve student achievement is to empower teachers with *multicultural education decision-making skills*. This approach represents a significant shift from previous efforts to help students succeed who are marginalized because of their ethnic, cultural, economic, or linguistic background. Prior efforts tended to "teacher proof" curricular designs and instructional materials or to place the burden of change almost exclusively on students.

Two additional guidelines underlie the ideas discussed in this paper. First, instructional decision making for ethnically diverse students should honor the key definitions, concepts, goals, and principles of multicultural education. This requires some fundamental knowledge and understanding of the essential content, conventions, and convictions of multicultural education. For example, advocates generally agree that although multicultural, global, and international education are similar and complementary in spirit and principle, they are not identical. Thus, teaching about Africa and Mexico is not the same as teaching the African American and Mexican American experiences. Second, although multicultural education is concerned primarily with ethnically and culturally diverse groups, issues, and events, it is also fundamentally an affective, ethical, and transformative endeavor, with social reform in schools and society as its ultimate outcome. Therefore, simply teaching factual information, such as the histories, contributions, and experiences of different ethnic groups, or merely adding multicultural materials to existing school and classroom structures is not enough. Effective multicultural

education is dependent not only on teachers acquiring the appropriate factual knowledge, but also on effective social action and changes in individual beliefs and institutional structures.

Teachers, therefore, must do more than be "aware" or "tolerant" of cultural and linguistic differences. They must *do* something about their teaching processes. That "something" should involve using students" cultures, experiences, and orientations as instructional tools for increasing students" achievement. In other words, much more teaching for ethnically diverse students should be filtered through students' own frames of reference than is currently the norm. In addition to being particularly useful for marginalized students of color, this approach benefits all students, an idea that is validated by general principles of learning. Experience has shown that "scaffolding" learning experiences, or creating opportunities for learning that build on previous experiences, enhances students' ability to master new knowledge and skills.

Another belief endorsed by scholars in the field of multicultural education that should inform instructional reform for ethnically diverse students is the importance of *relevant content in learning*. If students are interested and engaged in the content teachers use to teach skills, they are likely to learn the skills more easily. Many students of color (e.g., African, Latino, Native, and Asian Americans) are motivated by content about their own ethnic groups. Yet, too little high-quality content about diverse ethnic groups is integrated into school curricula. This absence greatly contributes to the low achievement of many students from these groups. Even students who perform well without culturally relevant content would benefit from the integration of such content. Their grades and test scores would likely improve, as would their feelings of self-esteem and personal efficacy. In addition, including information, perspectives, and other orientations about different ethnic groups can help non-members acquire much-needed knowledge about the contributions that these groups have made to U.S. society and to humankind. This knowledge may help reduce racial and ethnic prejudices, stereotyping, and hostilities, thus facilitating better intergroup relations. Several researchers have provided empirical evidence that shows that as prejudice and stereotyping in educational settings decrease, students' academic performance increases (see Allen & Boykin, 1992; Au, 1993; Neisser, 1986; Deyhle, 1995; Fullilove & Treisman, 1990; Steele, 1997; Matthews, 1988).

However, content about ethnic and cultural diversity should not be integrated haphazardly or incidentally into classroom instruction. Carefully conceived and well-planned schemas should be used to guide its deliberate and systemic inclusion. Several possible schema are available from scholarly literature (Banks, 1997; Sleeter & Grant, 1994; Bennett, 1995) to help guide these efforts. However, these frameworks are not flawless. Although they focus on what should be taught and why, they do not explain with sufficient clarity how to translate these prescriptions into actual behaviors in real classroom interactions.

For example, multicultural educators argue that culturally diverse experiences, problems, and perspectives should be integrated into learning experiences for all students, in all subject areas, at every grade level. Points of reference that students can relate to can help them focus more closely and for longer periods of time on academic tasks; they can also help students learn the skills they need to relate more effectively in interracial and multicultural settings. But teachers need to do more than accept that students have such needs. They must learn to connect these ideas to the *functional operations* of their classroom practices. Because learning

experiences are dynamic and constantly changing, responding to the "how-to" needs of multicultural teaching with only product answers (examples of "what to do") is insufficient. A more effective approach is for teachers to learn *how* high-quality multicultural teaching practices are developed and how these processes can be implemented in their own classrooms. This process might be called *contextual multicultural instructional decision making*.

Systematic Analysis of the Teaching Process

Before quality decisions can be made about the teaching practices that are most appropriate for ethnically diverse students, the aspects of teaching that are most problematic for these students must be identified. This can be accomplished by (1) systematically analyzing the content and processes of teaching, (2) identifying conflicts points between teaching and learning aspects of classroom content and instructional approaches that do not facilitate the learning of marginalized ethnically diverse students, and (3) making decisions about the kinds of changes needed to resolve these conflicts. This approach to improving instruction for diverse students is necessary because the mismatch between the way teachers teach and students learn often results in teaching and learning being much less effective. In other words, learning and teaching effectiveness are often the "causalities" of cultural conflicts in pluralistic classrooms.

Systems thinking about teaching and *structural analysis* of teaching are based on several assumptions: (1) The process of teaching encompasses some common tasks and functions that prevail across time, place, setting, circumstance, and individual teacher characteristics; (2) these functions are habitual and occur with a high degree of regularity; (3) they have content, organizational, and process features; and (4) making most, if not all, *regular* teaching functions effective for marginalized students of color has direct implications for reform. These assumptions are supported by the thinking and research of other educators as well. For example, Bossert (1979) suggests that every classroom activity can be described according to its structural and functional characteristics. Adams (1970) contends that the classroom is a social and behavioral setting with its own rituals, rules, regularities, and persistent patterns of behavior. Hudgins (1971) advises that "teachers must understand how classrooms function if they are to operate effectively and comfortably in them . . . such understanding is a prerequisite to the design and implementation of reasoned and viable educational change" (p. 71).

Several different classification schemas (see Haysom, 1985; Hudgins, 1971; Jackson, 1968; Rosenshine & Stevens, 1986) can be used to view teaching systematically and analytically. Individually and collectively, they describe teaching as

- including methodological, organizational, and managerial tasks;
- having preactive (preparatory) and interactive (face-to-face encounters) components;
- involving logical (thinking and reasoning), strategic (planning, organizing, and directing), and institutional (e.g., keeping records, chaperoning) acts; and

- unfolding through a progressional sequence of review, presentation-guided learning-practice, corrective feedback, supervision of independent practice, performance assessment, and re-teaching.

Within and across each of these general functions, some specific features dominate conventional classroom interactions, including the following:

- Students primarily play a passive role.
- Teachers use whole-group instruction as the primary method of instruction.
- Teachers largely control what goes on in the classroom.
- Teachers spend a great deal of time talking.

As a result of observing 1,000 classrooms throughout the U.S., Goodlad (1984) found the "emotional tone" of most classrooms to be "flat"—it was not harsh or punitive, overtly friendly or hostile, passionate or compassionate, exhilarating and engaging, or denigrating and boring. Further, Goodlad adds:

> The most successful classrooms may be those in which teachers succeed in creating commonly shared goals and individuals cooperate in ensuring each person's success in achieving them. The ultimate criterion becomes group accomplishment of individual progress. But this would be countervailing to prevailing practice. (p. 108)

This kind of classroom "climate," or what Holliday (1985) calls "transactional ecologies," can have devastating effects on the achievement potential of students from some ethnic and cultural backgrounds, as research studies conducted by Guttentag and Ross (1972), Kleinfeld (1975), Tharp and Gallimore (1988), and Philips (1983) have demonstrated.

Effective Teaching Practices

There are four primary functions that teachers must consider. This section provides a rationale and explanation for suggested changes that teachers may want to consider as they design more effective learning environments for marginalized students of color. The four functions are (1) managing classroom discourse, (2) providing students with conceptual examples, (3) delivering curricula, and (4) creating classroom climate.

All four functions play a significant role in the overall instructional process. They also are consistent with the underlying message that infusing cultural diversity into routine instructional functions is the most feasible way to improve the performance of underachieving students of color.

Modifying Classroom Discourse

Teacher talk is an essential element of successful teaching. Yet, the same kind of talk is not equally effective with all kinds of students. For example, some students from some ethnic groups respond very well to questions directed to them as individuals, to discourse prompts that challenge them to think about issues and explain their thought processes in detail, and to explicit praise about their individual accomplishments. Students from other ethnic groups find such exchanges with teachers unnerving, so much so that they may drop out of instructional interactions entirely. For the first type of students, explicit, individual-focused interactions with teachers facilitate learning; for the second group, this type of teacher talk inhibits learning.

In most classroom discourse, teachers dominate verbal interactions and almost exclusively control *approved* verbal opportunities and student tasks. Teachers control classroom discourse through their own verbal initiations and decisions about who else will talk, when, why, and under what circumstances (Cazden, 1986). Hudgins (1971) maintains that "someone is talking in classrooms about two-thirds of the time, and about two-thirds of that time it is the teacher" (p. 71). Teachers spend a great deal of time informing, explaining, demonstrating, disciplining, illustrating, directing, controlling, monitoring, and evaluating.

Hurt, Scott, and McCroskey (1978) argue that effective communication is the single most important prerequisite to successful teaching and learning. Obviously, then, teacher talk should be high among the priority areas targeted for change in developing effective teaching strategies for underachieving ethnically diverse students.

Sociolinguistic research (Philips, 1983; Greenbaum, 1985; Cazden, John, & Hymes, 1985) identifies a number of structural, substantive, and procedural components of classroom communication between students and teachers that affect the kinds of opportunities culturally different students have to participate in the instructional process. These components are turn-taking rules, attending and attention-getting behaviors, wait-time for responses, length of speech exchanges, questioning strategies, and feedback mechanisms. The quality of these opportunities correlates highly with students' race, ethnicity, culture, language, academic ability, and gender. Students who are middle class, European American, male, and native English-speaking tend to have an advantage in the classroom because, in general, teachers set higher expectations for their performance and because they engage more, are assisted more, are prompted more, and are given higher-order academic tasks to accomplish (Oakes, 1985; Good & Brophy, 1978). Undoubtedly, the quality of opportunities students have to engage in instructional discourses and to practice learning tasks correlates positively with actual achievement.

Some students from some ethnic groups don't participate in the classroom because they find that traditional rules of classroom behavior are incompatible with their own cultural rules of communication (Fox, 1994; Cazden, John, & Hymes, 1985; Perry & Delpit, 1998). For example, eye aversion is practiced among all major groups of color in the United States as an expression of deference to authority. Consequently, many African American, Latino, Native American, and Asian American students will not look directly at teachers when they are talking, which teachers may mistakenly interpret as a sign that these students are not paying attention. Yet, they may be listening intently. As another example, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and children whose

first language is not English may require more wait-time because of the processes involved in shifting from a native language to a second language. When they *do* respond, African American and Latino speakers tend to be very dramatic, emotional, and active. These preferences may result from the storytelling and affective expressions that characterize their traditional cultures.

Teachers also tend to use rather lengthy speech segments when giving information and instructions, but they provide little wait-time for students to formulate and present responses. Questions that require higher-order thinking skills, physical action, and genuine affective reactions are used infrequently. Opportunities for students to talk *through* learning tasks together—posing questions, finding solutions, and demonstrating mastery—are also rare occurrences. Yet, these kinds of interactions are a fundamental part of how some ethnically different students engage with learning tasks. Boykin (1979, 1982) and Allen and Butler (1996) have demonstrated the positive effects of these kinds of interactional styles on the achievement of African American students. Au (1993), Tharp and Gallimore (1988), and Boggs, Watson-Gegeo, and McMillen (1985) have done likewise with Native Hawaiians.

Therefore, the "what" and "how" of teacher instructional interactions in the classroom (both talking and relating to students) must change to reflect more sensitivity to the cultural backgrounds of different students. These modifications might include the following:

- Extending wait-time and changing turn-taking rules to honor the participation styles of students of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

- Using alternative cues to indicate attending behaviors, such as asking students to summarize points previously made, to restate another's point of view, or to declare their personal preferences on issues under discussion.

- Shortening the length of segments of teacher talk.

- Minimizing teacher talk by using learning strategies that are more student focused and active, such as small-group tasks, simulations, role playing, dramatic readings, and cooperative learning.

- Providing opportunities for students to establish, monitor, manage, and correct their own rules of classroom discourse.

- Honoring students' natural learning styles and ways of learning as much as possible. For example, teachers might encourage students to use cultural styles of storytelling to demonstrate their translation and reading comprehension skills, to present critical incidents in social studies, or to report the results of inquiry exercises or research topics. Teachers might also ask more divergent, higher-order cognitive and affective questions that give all students an opportunity to respond, and then accept students' affective reactions as legitimate contributions to the learning process.

Providing Students with Culturally Relevant Conceptual Examples

A careful look at how teachers allocate time for speaking is revealing. Much of the actual act of teaching is devoted to providing examples, illustrations, vignettes, scenarios, and anecdotes to demonstrate the meanings and functions of concepts, ideas, facts, principles, and skills. The process begins with naming, defining, and explaining the idea being taught. All other subsequent instructional efforts are devoted to illustrating how, when, and in what situations the idea or concept can be applied. These illustrations act as "bridges" between the abstract idea and the life experiences of learners. As such, they are the conduits or transmitters of meaningfulness in learning. Thus, the theory of probability, a literary analogy, a moral dilemma, or the concept of interdependence become meaningful to different students to the extent that the examples used to illustrate them reflect the experiences and perspectives of a variety of cultural, ethnic, and social groups. When teachers fail to use culturally relevant teaching examples, they inhibit the learning of students of color. This is not to say that students will never learn knowledge and skills that are not nested in their own frames of reference. Undoubtedly some will, but many will not, since abstractions are always more difficult to learn than practicalities. Connecting school learning to the life experiences of diverse students is a powerful way to make the academic practical and, simultaneously, improve achievement.

An important way to make teaching and learning more effective for ethnically diverse students of color is to broaden the pool of teaching examples so that they are culturally pluralistic. This requires teachers to understand the function of examples in teaching, to consider the types of examples they currently use, and to recognize the cultural limitations of these examples. They must then identify the types of examples that are best suited for different cultural groups; learn to create, locate, and/or solicit them; and decide how to incorporate them into regular teaching repertoires and routines. None of these essential decisions can be made without a working knowledge of different groups, cultural traditions, value systems, learning styles, communication patterns, world views, and styles of interpersonal interaction.

Multicultural teaching examples serve many functions simultaneously. In addition to functioning as "bridges of meaningfulness" between academic abstractions and practical living, they help all students learn about cultural pluralism as they develop their academic skills; demonstrate that cultural pluralism is a real and valued fact of daily life in and outside of the classroom; and allow cultural diversity to penetrate the inner core of the teaching and learning processes, as well as the lives of students. For example, showing how basic forms or shapes, such as lines, circles, squares, and triangles, are applied in different types of ethnic architecture (e.g., Native American long houses, Moslem mosques, Jewish synagogues, indigenous African homes, and U.S. schools), arts (e.g., paintings, crafts), and symbols makes it easier for students to learn to recognize these forms and shapes. Similarly, using ethnic examples of protest poetry while teaching literary criticism may increase some students' interest and, therefore, mastery of the task. Using such examples benefits *all* students by introducing them to multicultural content within the context of a routine literature theme. This approach also teaches literary criticism and critical thinking skills, enhances students' knowledge of and appreciation for ethnically diverse literature, and reinforces students' pride in their ethnic heritage.

These skills may not be measured by standardized tests, but nonetheless they are powerful indicators of students' achievement. Furthermore, they positively impact students' academic performance. Research conducted by Ladson-Billings (1994), Krater, Zeni, and Cason (1994), and Howard (1998) reveal that the academic achievement of African Americans increases when teachers simultaneously and deliberately help students develop positive self-concepts, social interaction skills, cultural pride, and community building skills. When students are engaged in building community as they are learning, they are developing "together" a sense of connectedness in the classroom, responsibility for one another, and the sense that no individual member of the class is left to struggle through learning alone. Based on their research, Holliday (1985) and Spindler (1987) conclude that self-confidence, social skills, and mastery of the procedural protocols that surround schooling are prerequisites for students having opportunities to participate in academic interactions and improve their academic performance. These findings have profound implications for reforming instruction to improve the achievement of marginalized students of color.

Many students of color, particularly those who are recent U.S. immigrants, do not know how to "do" schooling U.S. style. For example, they may not know how to maneuver through the ritual of testing. Establishing informal relationships with teachers may be totally alien to them given their cultural orientations and prior experiences. Thinking critically, inquiring, analyzing, and expressing opposing points of view are taboo for students from some ethnic groups, especially those who have recent memories or experiences of living under a totalitarian or dictatorial political regime (Fox, 1994; Igoa, 1995). Yet, U.S. teachers and test-makers almost glibly expect students to perform these functions without considering the insurmountable obstacles some students face in trying to meet these demands. The situation is further complicated by the fact that these skills are integral to high-order academic achievement in all subject areas. If students have to "overcome" deeply ingrained cultural values, orientations, and learning styles to perform these learning tasks, they may not succeed either in crossing these cultural borders or in mastering the tasks. The possibility of this two-tiered failure is highly likely for students who do not receive any assistance from their teachers. Therefore, there are many challenges and opportunities for improving the achievement of students of color that have little to do with academic content. Rather, these challenges deal with mastering the procedures of schooling, such as how to take a test, how to "present" oneself effectively to different audiences, and how to shift from one cultural system to another.

Infusing Multicultural Content into Curricula

A third area of teaching that can facilitate improved achievement for ethnically different students is curriculum development. Teachers are always designing and modifying plans for instruction. They should understand these functions systematically and know how to incorporate multicultural content and perspectives into curricula. In other words, they should be able to transform the curriculum to make it more culturally pluralistic.

Typically, curriculum includes six components: rationale, goals, objectives, content, activities, and evaluation. Materials, resources, and time lines often are included as well. These components can be further grouped by function and value into two categories: (1) substantive and intrinsic, (2) methodological and instrumental. The substantive components are the

achievement outcomes expected of all students. They are *standards* of performance and, therefore, are nonnegotiable. They appear in the curriculum as goals and objectives. All other components are methods and tools that help teachers achieve the goals and objectives they have set for their students. These tools should be diversified to accommodate different cultural contexts, settings, and students in the school and community. In other words, alternative pathways to learning should be used to achieve common learning outcomes for ethnically diverse students.

Without a doubt, all students should learn to read, write, think critically, and solve problems, as well as master the facts and principles of the subjects commonly taught in schools, such as mathematics, science, social studies, the humanities, fine arts, vocational education, and computer literacy. But there is less consensus about *how* they should acquire this knowledge and skills. Answers to this question depend upon for whom, as well as when and where, teaching takes place. Curriculum content, activities, resources, and assessment procedures should vary across and within all domains of learning in order to reflect the experiences, contributions, lifestyles, and learning-style preferences of different ethnic and cultural groups. In the context of the standards movement, state and national "essential or common learning outcomes" should apply to students across all ethnic groups, but the benchmarks (or indicators) of mastery, as well as the strategic plans and instructional actions that local education agencies (e.g., districts, schools, classrooms) use to help students accomplish these standards need to accommodate and reflect cultural diversity. Furthermore, culturally diverse literature, arts, and aesthetics should complement factual information. More active learning, participatory partnerships, cooperative arrangements, and creative expressions should be incorporated into learning activities. More diverse combinations of written, oral, and kinesthetic opportunities should be provided for students to demonstrate their mastery of skills and tasks. These kinds of learning experiences are more effective for culturally different students because the rich content, varied formats, and multisensory stimulations they offer are more compatible with their cultural values and learning styles.

Creating Classroom Climates that are Conducive to Learning

Teaching involves more than creating curricula and engaging in classroom discourse. Another essential component of the process is the physical, social, and interpersonal climate or environment created for learning. According to Moos (1979), all classrooms are social environments that have several common dimensions: relationships among students and teachers, climate conditions, task characteristics, and managerial rules and regulations. Together, these elements form the social context and set the stage for learning.

Research (Moos, 1979) shows that students achieve greater satisfaction, personal growth, and higher levels of performance in classrooms characterized by high student involvement; clear roles; strong, personal, student-teacher relationships; demonstrated caring for students as people; the use of innovative teaching methods; and in which students are rewarded for academic work —all within a coherent, well-organized context. These characteristics are especially important for culturally different students whose learning styles are *field dependent* (e.g., people centered, affective, humanistic, and group based). Yet, in most U.S. classrooms, students operate largely on an individual basis, have a limited range of movement and involvement, and are expected to

function in a rather rigidly organized and sterile physical space. Relationships between students and teachers are formal and somewhat distant, and classroom resources are too often limited to the mechanical tools (e.g., maps, books, machinery, laboratory equipment) of various subject areas. The notable exception is elementary classrooms, where "decorations" are more common and students and teachers work in closer harmony with one another.

Students from some cultural and ethnic groups, especially African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and Native Hawaiians, find formal, passive learning environments disconcerting, "cold," and distracting, so much so that they have difficulty concentrating on academic tasks. Many mainstream school procedures are linear (i.e., they use *topic centering*) (e.g., in terms of how information is arranged and presented; expectations about student behavior, such as lining up to enter and exit the classroom, sitting in straight rows). But the cultural structures of many ethnic groups are circular. In learning situations, students from many cultural and ethnic groups prefer group arrangements; responding in ways that integrate the affective, cognitive, and psychomotor dimensions; *topic-chaining* in the organization and presentation of ideas; and an environment in which all dimensions—humans, objects, space, and emotional tone—interact. An active, cooperative, warm, and emotionally supportive environment is fundamental to their effective learning.

Given the learning environment that many ethnically different students prefer, how can classroom climates be modified to make them more amenable to higher achievement? Although specific students and classrooms have their unique dynamics, nonetheless there are general practices that teachers can use that create more effective learning environments:

- Using cooperative group, team, and pair arrangements for learning as the normative structure, rather than the exception
- Using learning stations, multimedia presentations, and interactive video, rather than some form of lecturing, to present information
- Frequently varying the format of learning activities to incorporate more affective responses, motion, and movement
- Encouraging friendships between students and teachers
- Creating genuine partnerships between students and teachers so that students actively participate in making decisions about how their learning experiences will occur and be evaluated
- Changing roles and procedures that govern life in the classroom so that they reflect some of the codes of behavior and participation styles of culturally different students
- Devising ways for students to monitor and manage their own classroom behavior and that of other students

- Creating an esprit de corps of "family" to make interpersonal, classroom relationships more cohesive and meaningful

- Including more human centered and culturally different images, artifacts, experiences, and incidents in classroom decorations and as props for teaching

- Developing a sense of community and shared responsibility among students for one another's learning

Conclusion

The ultimate answer to creating more effective instructional practices for underachieving ethnically different students is empowering teachers to make better decisions for themselves within their own teaching contexts. Empowerment is often interpreted as having the power and authority to make decisions. These are not at issue here. Research clearly and consistently documents that teachers are the power brokers in their classrooms. As Goodlad's (1984) extensive study of schooling shows, the intellectual terrain of the classroom is laid out by teachers, who play the major role in deciding what, where, when, and how students will learn. Furthermore, teachers at all levels of schooling have significant, if not total, control over the selection of teaching strategies and learning activities; evaluating students; setting goals and objectives; determining the use of classroom space; scheduling time and materials; grouping students; and selecting the content, topics, and skills that will be taught. Teachers are virtually autonomous in creating the learning environment.

In the context of this discussion, *teacher empowerment* means having the knowledge, will, and skill to incorporate cultural diversity into all routine teaching functions. Having the *knowledge* means understanding how cultural conditioning affects the behavior of students and teachers, knowing the cultural contributions that different groups have made to the disciplines (e.g., mathematics, science, literature, politics), and knowing how different teaching tasks converge to form *systems of teaching functions*. Having the *will* means accepting the legitimacy of cultural differences, as well as being enthusiastic about affirming, celebrating, and using these differences to enrich the educational experiences of ethnically diverse students. Having the *skill* means having the ability to competently translate new knowledge about cultural and ethnic diversity and the nature of teaching functions into strategies that make instruction more effective for a wider variety of students.

The effectiveness of any teaching practice for marginalized students of color is a direct reflection of how well those aspects that need to be changed are identified and understood. Only then can good decisions about how to make necessary changes be made expeditiously and coherently. Another essential test of effectiveness is the extent to which teaching behaviors reflect teachers' technical knowledge, personal caring for students as individuals, and experience in integrating multicultural information and perspectives. Although the specific instructional practices that are effective for particular classrooms vary by setting and circumstance, the analytic, diagnostic, and decision-making processes out of which they emerge are similar. These processes involve using the experiences, heritages, contributions, and learning styles of students

from different ethnic, cultural, racial, and social backgrounds as filters through which to send instructional messages. The resulting continuity between home and school frames of reference, as well as the scaffolding of new information and information-processing styles onto those that students learn prior to coming to school, will lead to significant improvements in many different kinds of achievement.

Discussion Questions

1. Why should different "at-risk constituencies" be specified as a condition of designing effective educational reform strategies for them?

2. What evidence is provided in the paper to support the author's claims that virtually all students of color are "at-risk" in some way in conventional schools? Can similar claims be made about mainstream European American students as well?

3. Why does the author believe that instruction is a better means than curriculum for improving the school achievement of marginalized students? Do your classroom experiences support or refute these beliefs? Explain why or why not.

4. What do we need to know and do differently about schooling, teaching, and life experiences to teach marginalized students more effectively?

5. What are some major opportunities and obstacles in your local school situations for implementing the ideas suggested in this paper?

6. What are some of the problems teachers may encounter in identifying and using culturally appropriate teaching examples with ethnically diverse students? How can they overcome these problems?

7. What are some of the non-academic aspects of teaching that might interfere with the academic learning of students from different ethnic groups? How can these be changed to reflect greater sensitivity to cultural diversity and improve academic achievement?

8. What are two suggestions for instructional reform suggested by the author that you are most likely and two others that you are least likely to use in your own teaching situations? Explain the reasons for both sets of choices.

9. Provide some examples from your own classroom teaching experiences to illustrate other major ideas and principles presented in this paper.

10. Based on the information presented in this paper and your own teaching experiences, develop a descriptive profile of effective teaching for marginalized students of color.

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CHAPTER THREE

IMMIGRANT STUDENTS AND STANDARDS-BASED REFORM: EXAMINING OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN

by

Pam McCollum, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Although the expressed goal of nationally developed content standards is to promote high achievement for "all" children, no explicit guidance is offered about how to help different groups of students, including those "at-risk" for failure, meet these standards. In particular, the place of secondary-level, recent-immigrant students in the standards-based reform movement is unclear. Arguing that appropriate voluntary opportunity-to-learn standards generally have been ignored, this paper presents issues that should be the focus of such standards for secondary-level recent-immigrant students. Selected stories from an education collaborative for recent-immigrant high school students are shared to illustrate various ways in which the status quo can be changed to provide recent-immigrant students with the resources they need to achieve.

Dr. Pam McCollum is a senior education associate at the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) and an adjunct professor at the University of Texas. She is nationally known for her work in the area of Bilingual Education with an emphasis on second language acquisition, bilingual language and literacy development, language assessment, and English as a second language (ESL) methods. Dr. McCollum is a professional developer as well as a researcher in these areas. Her research is classroom-based and focuses on different dimensions of bilingualism and emergent literacy. Recent publications include Lessons Learned, Lessons Shared: Texas Immigrant Education Collaborative and Failing Our Children—Finding Alternatives to In-Grade Retention.

INTRODUCTION

Teresa López is a seventeen-year-old student from Mexico who arrived in Houston a few months ago. She is a sophomore at the city's largest high school where she has one period of English a day. During the remainder of the day, she sits through classes in the sophomore curriculum that are geared to assist English-speaking students pass the state accountability test required for graduation. While the rest of the class is discussing the titration process in chemistry, Teresa is given a list of vocabulary words to copy.

Teresa's case is not an isolated one. She is considered at-risk for completing school because she possesses three of the characteristics that classify a student as

at-risk for failure.[1] She is (1) an immigrant student with (2) limited English proficiency (LEP)[2] who (3) lives in a high-poverty area. As a secondary-level recent-immigrant student, she must quickly learn English in order to master academic content and, because she lives in a state that requires a graduation test, pass the test at an acceptable level in order to receive a high school diploma, regardless of her course grades.

Where do students like Teresa fit in standards-based reform? Although the nation's governors, other policymakers, and education leaders have demonstrated their support for standards-based reform and expressed their hope that "all" students will achieve at high levels, how these goals and high hopes will translate to different groups of children, including those at-risk for failure, is not clear. The current climate is one in which students' success or failure rests squarely on their shoulders, without regard for whether the individual schools in which they find themselves provide the necessary opportunities to learn. As Kozol (1991) and others (Coons, 1970; Cárdenas, 1997) point out, the poor academic performance of the nation's neediest children is strongly related to inequities in school financing that result in a lack of opportunities to learn.

In 1994, the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) was passed, reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). The significance of the Act was its establishment of the core principle that disadvantaged children should achieve to the same challenging academic standards as their more fortunate peers (see U.S. Department of Education, 1999). The IASA legislation mandated changes in how education is delivered, including improved instruction and professional development to align with high standards, stronger accountability, and coordination of resources to improve education for all children.

The 1994 IASA legislation noted that in addition to national academic standards, to be implemented by the states, voluntary opportunity-to-learn standards should be identified to ensure that students have access to the resources they need to meet academic standards. The IASA legislation highlighted a number of conditions that are necessary for learning, including a safe school staffed by appropriately licensed and certified staff who have appropriate, up-to-date materials and equipment and adequate release time for planning. Moreover, to improve their teaching skills and stay abreast of new innovations, these teachers have access to high-quality, in-depth staff development that encompasses the presentation, implementation, and refinement of teaching techniques and methodologies.

This paper argues that schools adopting a standards-based approach must establish opportunity-to-learn standards for all students, including those at-risk for failure. The following sections focus on secondary-level, recent-immigrant students. First, a brief overview is presented

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[1] A student is classified as at-risk according to the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) if he or she is a member of any of the following groups: children in high poverty areas; children who are limited English proficient; migratory children; neglected or delinquent children; homeless children; immigrant children; American Indian children; children with disabilities; refugee children; and teen parents.

[2] In this paper, Limited English Proficient (LEP) is used to refer to students whose first language is a language other than English and whose English oral proficiency is limited in varying degrees. LEP students may be immigrant students from non-English-speaking countries or U.S. citizens from language-minority families who grew up speaking a language other than English. LEP student classifications are determined by oral language proficiency tests, which vary widely in the components of language tested and comparability of ratings.

of immigration education and of key legal cases that have guaranteed immigrants' rights to a free public education. Second, a discussion of the necessity of opportunity-to-learn standards is presented. Finally, selected stories of successful programs for secondary-level recent-immigrant Mexican students are shared to illustrate how providing these students with appropriate opportunities to learn increased their chances of success.

Immigration into the United States has changed dramatically in recent years, both in volume and in character. Since 1990, twice as many people have come to the United States each year than arrived during the country's heaviest period of immigration at the turn of the century (Macionis, 1996). A little more than 1.1 million immigrants arrive annually (National Immigration Forum, 1994). Settlement patterns show immigrants have concentrated primarily in large urban areas in five states: California, Illinois, Texas, New Jersey, and New York. It is predicted that by the year 2010, immigrant students will number 9 million and account for 22 percent of the school-age population (Board on Children and Families, 1995).

While immigrants during the "Great Immigration" of the 1900s were primarily of European origin, today's newcomers increasingly are people of color. In 1992, immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean were the most numerous, making up 44 percent of the immigrant population. Immigrants from Asia and Europe represented 37 percent and 15 percent of the immigrant population, respectively (National Immigration Forum, 1994).

Unfortunately, the escalation in U.S. immigration from the 1980s to the present has been coupled with a steady decrease in funding for education programs that serve immigrant students. For example, during the 1980s, the number of LEP students increased by 50 percent, but funding for bilingual education fell 48 percent (Fix & Zimmerman, 1993). The speed and volume of immigration are reflected in the pace at which many schools have changed in character. Those schools find they are in need of a new array of resources to meet the needs of recent-immigrant students.

Statutes that guarantee education to immigrant children in U.S. public schools grew out of legal actions to redress the rights of immigrant children and limited English proficient (LEP) students to an equal education. Specifically, the *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) case originated from the complaints of Chinese American parents in San Francisco that their LEP children could not understand instruction provided in English for native English-speaking children. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the district was required to take affirmative steps to provide LEP students with services that would enable them to learn English and obtain a meaningful education. Although specific programs of instruction were not recommended, the court suggested two possibilities—English as a second language (ESL) classes and native language instruction.

The *Lau* decision was followed by the Lau Remedies of 1975, issued by the Office of Civil Rights (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare) to redress past inequities in the education of LEP students. The Lau Remedies led to many of the practices that now are commonly followed in schools (e.g., determining students' home and primary language, assessing students' needs and placing them in an appropriate program of study based on those needs). The Remedies went one step beyond the *Lau v. Nichols* decision, however, in

recommending bilingual education as the most effective program of instruction for students whose primary language is not English.

The *Lau v. Nichols* decision and the Lau Remedies addressed the education of LEP students. In *Plyer v. Doe* (1982), the U.S. Supreme Court established the rights of immigrant children to a public education when it ruled in a 5-4 decision that states were bound to educate all children who are residents, regardless of immigrant status. The case came about because a Texas school district attempted to deny the use of funds to educate the children of undocumented workers. The court ruled that children of undocumented workers were guaranteed an equal education under the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. The court wrote that denying education to the children of immigrants would result in a growing class of workers who are unable to support themselves and contribute to society.

The most recent influx of immigrants has led some to question the place of immigrant children in the education system. One example is California's Proposition 187, the "Illegal Aliens Ineligibility for Public Services Verification and Reporting Initiative Statute." Passed in 1994, Proposition 187 denied education services, including elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education, to immigrants and their children. Proponents based their argument on the claim that immigrants strain public services at the expense of citizens. Public sentiment was strongly in favor of the measure, which passed with 60 percent of the vote. Although Proposition 187 was overturned, Proposition 227, the "English for the Children Initiative," has since been passed, which limits sheltered-English instruction to one year but allows parents to request a bilingual instructor.

In general, most secondary-level immigrant students are seen as "beyond the purview" of a standards-based education system because most are limited English proficient. These students are "at-risk" for failure because they possess three of the characteristics that classify students as at-risk: Like Teresa, they are (1) immigrants with (2) limited English proficiency who (3) live in high-poverty areas. Due to present school funding formulas, they find themselves in schools that are least able to supply the types of resources they need to perform to high standards.

In the minds of many people, recent-immigrant students, particularly those at the secondary level, are not able to meet high standards. These students often are given low-level, unchallenging material because they are considered incapable of participating in traditional lecture classes that require them to analyze and synthesize material from subject-area textbooks and turn in written assignments in English. Such assignments are indeed challenging for many immigrant students, like Teresa in the opening vignette, who may receive only 50 minutes of personalized English instruction during the school day.

Another reason recent-immigrant students do not receive the instruction they need is the heavy emphasis on high-stakes testing. Nineteen states now require students to pass a high-school exit exam, which in many cases becomes the curriculum. This "test-based" curriculum is taught and retaught in secondary schools to help students earn a passing score on the high school exit test. Since preparation for the exit exam often begins as early as the sophomore year of high school, students have multiple opportunities to take the test.

Immigrant students often are excluded from state accountability testing for a particular period of time while they master English. Nonetheless, immigrant students who do not receive special services through a newcomer's center or other special program aimed at meeting their needs sit through classes designed to help English-speaking students pass the exit test. This is a very extreme case of "assessment-driven instruction"—the test has become the curriculum. It is easy to understand that if students take a test in a language they do not fully comprehend, the results will be flawed, but it is hard to understand why these same students nonetheless are required to take these classes.

Reform initiatives across the country are focused on students achieving high standards of performance. But voluntary opportunity-to-learn standards, which ensure that all students have the same opportunities to learn, generally are ignored. If *all* students are to meet these high standards, schools must ensure that they are satisfying their responsibility to provide students with the resources they need to learn.

Examining Opportunity-to-Learn Standards

The third National Education Summit on education reform, held in the fall of 1999, concluded that now that standards have been set and are being addressed, the remaining issues on the school reform agenda are (1) improved teacher quality, (2) holding students accountable for results, and (3) examining opportunities to learn. Given these priorities, the needs of at-risk students in general should be carefully examined by specialists who understand the educational needs of each at-risk category of students. At a minimum, opportunity-to-learn standards for recent-immigrant students should address the following:

- ***An English as a second language (ESL) program that enables students to use English as a medium for learning academic content.*** In order for students to achieve academic standards, in addition to general communication skills, students must possess cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1983, 1984). At this level, students are able to problem solve in English and perform the types of cognitive activities required in content-area instruction.

- ***Teachers who are skilled in teaching ESL.*** ESL was once considered a specialty for a few who taught in metropolitan areas, but now expertise in ESL is essential for teaching in most school systems. Teacher preparation institutions need to require ESL courses for *all* future teachers so that teachers know how to promote second language acquisition and literacy before they encounter their first teaching assignment.

- ***Teachers and counselors who understand the background and culture of their students.*** Future teachers also need to know how to instruct students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The unwitting violation of cultural norms can inhibit learning. Education ethnographies are an excellent resource for teachers to use to learn how education is provided in the students' culture of origin and the role that parents play in their children's education.

- ***Teachers and counselors who understand the basic issues of education linguistics.*** Counselors often are the first people immigrant students meet after they register. In order for counselors to make appropriate decisions about students' placement in programs of study and for teachers to best serve students, they must be grounded in a number of issues:

  - ➢ how second languages are acquired in natural settings and best learned in the classroom
  - ➢ the relationship between language proficiency and academic achievement
  - ➢ sources of cultural bias in classroom texts, materials, and tests
  - ➢ the relationship between first- and second-language literacy

  One study (Suárez-Orozco, 1989) found that high school counselors of immigrant students who lacked appropriate background knowledge served as gatekeepers and underestimated students' potential, which negatively affected students' ability to complete school. Rarely did these counselors give students information about post-secondary schooling. One way to ensure that immigrant students receive high-quality, consistent counseling is to staff a bilingual counselor who advises all recent-immigrant students and follows their progress. Students are more likely to succeed when teachers and counselors have high expectations for them and when students are enrolled in courses that build on their past learning experiences. A counselor who can more readily communicate with these students and who understands the cultural dynamics that can affect students' success can greatly facilitate students' mastery of academic standards. This relationship also can help improve communication with students' families because family members may be able to interact more easily with the bilingual counselor.

- ***School staff who can explain to students in their native language what standards are, what is expected of them, and what goes on in a standards-based classroom.*** Some secondary-level recent-immigrant students may not understand why they have to attend school, let alone meet standards. An immigrant student, for example, may not have attended school for several years prior to entering a U.S. high school because basic education in his or her native country was considered complete at a much earlier age. Another student may have left school to help support his or her family. Many immigrant students also have difficulty understanding how U.S. classrooms typically are structured. They may be accustomed to very traditional schools that require them to memorize and restate lecture material. These students need help learning to understand and adjust to performance-based classrooms in which they evaluate their own work or work on collaborative projects that receive group grades.

- ***School staff who can communicate with families in their native language about academic standards.*** The importance of parent involvement in facilitating students' learning is a constant theme in the IASA legislation. Unfortunately, parent involvement commonly is approached from a "deficit" approach as evidenced by the types of topics frequently offered in parent outreach efforts (e.g., "How to Be a Better Parent"). In order for parents to support their children in a standards-based system, however, they need to understand academic standards and why they are important. In addition to explaining standards to parents in their native language, inviting parents into the classroom to observe will help them understand what is expected of their children.

- ***An in-take process that obtains an academic history of the child apart from school transcripts and test scores.*** Students should be interviewed regarding their academic background and personal learning history. These interviews also can be used to begin building collaborative relationships between home and school. For example, an interview can be an opportunity to learn more about areas of specialized knowledge that family members possess (e.g., car repair, carpentry, sewing, construction) or students' recent work experience, which many secondary students have had in their country of origin. Framing instruction around these areas can increase students' motivation and opportunities for participation. As Moll et al. (1990) suggest, working-class families without high levels of education possess high-level knowledge associated with earning a living, which can be used as a springboard for instruction. Inviting parents to demonstrate and speak about their skills in the classroom acknowledges their skills and gives them the opportunity to participate in their children's learning.

- ***Sufficient planning time during the school day to collaborate with colleagues and support services.*** Because of the departmentalized nature of high schools and the large number of students that teachers see daily, teachers need school time to collaborate with colleagues about students' academic and social needs. Recent-immigrant students and their families require many services from a variety of sources, both in and outside of the school. Students who need food, clothes, social services, and medical services or whose families do not have electricity cannot be expected to achieve academic standards until these basic needs are adequately met.

- ***Amendments to existing policy to accommodate the learning needs of groups of recent-immigrant students.*** Secondary students often are placed in classes that are appropriate for meeting graduation requirements, but inappropriate given their English proficiency. Policies need to be more flexible to allow immigrant students to earn credit for graduation. For example, a requirement to take a specific number of ESL courses in a non-credit sequence may be a disadvantage for students who could skip a course if they demonstrated the level of proficiency required by the course. District policies should be examined and, if appropriate, revised to give immigrant students sufficient opportunities to learn, accumulate credits, and graduate.

- ***Relationships with community-based agencies, businesses, and other organizations that give students opportunities to learn, graduate, gain employment, or pursue post-secondary study.*** Community organizations have valuable resources to contribute to schools in terms of experience, personnel, and fresh ways of approaching education issues. In addition, they often have volunteers who are proficient in the languages spoken in the community and can provide connections to social services and work opportunities for students.

Some of the guidelines described above are based on common sense. Others were formulated as a result of my experience as a site director of a program for recent-immigrant students at an El Paso, Texas, border high school. The following section briefly describes this program, its origins, and examples of successful initiatives that provided immigrant students with appropriate opportunities to learn.

In 1993, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation funded projects to investigate how the education of recent-immigrant students could be improved to enhance their chances of completing school and pursuing post-secondary education or successful employment. The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) was one of four groups in different geographic regions of the country with high rates of immigration chosen to conduct this research.[3] IDRA directed the research of the Texas Immigrant Education Collaborative (TIEC) in two secondary school sites: a Houston middle school with an international student population and a border high school in El Paso where 98 percent of students were of Mexican descent.

The membership of the collaborative was made up of representatives from both secondary school campuses, IDRA, the University of Houston-Downtown, the University of Texas-El Paso (UTEP), local businesses, and community-based organizations. The goal of the collaborative was to improve the education of immigrant children by accelerating their mastery of reading and writing skills, expanding their access to content-area knowledge, and strengthening their access to work and post-secondary education opportunities.

Through the collaborative work of the TIEC, secondary-level, recent-immigrant students were provided with more opportunities to learn. The TIEC project followed a general framework used by IDRA to effect school change. The framework, which is responsive to the unique needs of each campus, consists of three interrelated phases of work. In phase one, participants articulate their vision of the project' s purposes and objectives and reach consensus about the changes that should be made. In phase two, a plan of action is designed and implemented. In phase three, participants monitor and evaluate the implemented changes to assess their effectiveness and to determine how change can be sustained over time.

TIEC was an ambitious project that involved a variety of players across a range of institutions, organizations, and agencies. Each organization had different organizational patterns, protocols for conducting business, and ideas about its relationship to the schools that hosted the project. In some cases, there was a history of fruitful partnerships with the two project schools.

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[3]The other three organizations that participated in the research were The University of Maryland-Baltimore County, The University of California-Long Beach, and California Tomorrow in San Francisco.

However, in other cases, outside organizations and businesses had not attempted to build relationships with schools because they saw them as self-contained systems with few structures to facilitate collaboration.

Lessons Learned

The lessons learned from participating in this education collaborative are many, but can be distilled into five broad lessons:

Lesson #1: Provide teachers with time, resources, and opportunities to collaborate with one another and with administrators. Thoughtful interaction and collaboration about the needs of students, in particular the needs of recent-immigrant students, opens the door for change and improves schools from within (see Barth, 1990).

Lesson #2: Use forums, partnerships, and collaborative work groups to bring together advocates for immigrant students (from education, business, and community-based organizations). People who have an in-depth understanding and appreciation for the unique problems and opportunities facing recent-immigrant students should be well represented on school- or district-level committees and other working groups. Bringing together advocates for immigrant students stimulates creativity about new solutions to old issues, such as parent involvement; instruction of over-age, under-schooled students; gifted and talented education; and career education. Project initiatives that seem outlandish to some at the start may become accepted practices and, in some instances, adopted as district-wide programs. (One such program for LEP students at a center for career and technology education is described later in this paper.)

Lesson #3: Recognize that initiating school change can be a slow process. It takes time to make successful new campus programs part of school or district policy. New programs must mesh with existing programs, operating practices, and school or district requirements. For example, new high-school-level programs may need to be modified to ensure that students are able to accumulate enough credits for graduation. One way to greatly facilitate the process of integrating programs is to garner the support of district-level administrators who believe in the project and can help open avenues for change at the district level.

Lesson #4: Be prepared for external changes that can have a destabilizing effect on initiatives. Although education reform literature touts the advantages of forming education collaboratives, little is said about pitfalls that can derail well-intentioned efforts. Changes in administrative staff (such as the loss of a principal who has been a strong supporter) school restructuring, or the administrative restructuring of a district (e.g., from a centralized to a decentralized mode) can be swift and unexpected and, consequently, throw a project off track. "Two steps forward, one step back" characterizes many reform efforts. If a key advocate leaves the district, for example, time may need to be spent bringing his or her replacement up to speed, making requested changes, reviewing plans that had been made the previous year, and reformulating plans given the new leadership dynamic. New volunteers or other advocates may need to be attracted and

then oriented to the project, which can take time away from planned activities. However, recognizing that the work of collaboratives will not be as linear as it looks on paper can help everyone involved react in the best way to unexpected changes.

Lesson #5: Develop collaborative relationships with people outside education. The success of reform initiatives can be greatly enriched by support from individuals and groups in the community; in some cases, it may *depend upon* their support. If the goal of the collaborative is to enhance immigrant students' preparation for work or post-secondary study, it may be important to establish links with businesses, community-based organizations, and institutions of higher education. Relationships with outside organizations can lead to field trips, mentoring opportunities, and job-shadowing experiences, as well as opportunities to develop longer-term relationships between students and community members. Volunteers from outside education also can enrich the program planning and development process by offering fresh, objective perspectives that are not constrained by a "history" with the school system.

The Texas Immigrant Education Collaborative (TIEC) resulted in a number of "success stories" of providing recent-immigrant students with the opportunities they needed to learn. Two stories are shared in this section to illustrate what is necessary to provide immigrant students with the opportunities they need to reach high academic standards. The first deals with a career education program for over-age students; the second, a newcomers center. These stories, both of which took place at the project high school in El Paso, Texas, are offered not as prescriptions for replicating successful programs, but as examples of the process of creating and sustaining successful programs.

Career Education Program

The El Paso Independent School District (ISD) has a successful career education program for limited English proficient (LEP) students. The program combines half-day study at each student's high school with half-day study at the district's center for career and technology education. Students select one of 19 programs of study that lead to internships with local businesses. The career center also assists students in finding employment after they complete the program.

Unlike vocational or technical centers in many large urban areas that become "dumping grounds" for LEP students, the El Paso ISD's career center originally had no programs for LEP students. The idea of sending LEP students to the career center conflicted with the conventional thinking of educators at the center and educators at the project high school. Thus the program began as a pilot program with only five students. Prior to entering the pilot program, students took a vocational aptitude battery, visited the career center to observe classes, and received information about each program of study.

Because classes at the career center were presented in English, the principal of the project high school provided a full-time tutor who attended classes with students and helped them with their work. The tutor was invaluable in helping students become more confident and in helping

them understand the specialized vocabulary they needed for their plumbing, electricity, cosmetology, metal trades, or drafting programs. Further support was given by teachers at the career center who kept teachers at the project high school apprised of students' needs and experiences.

As a result of this program, educators began to change their perspectives about what LEP students are capable of achieving. Carmen's story, which follows, demonstrates how students can succeed in such programs.

"Carmen" (pseudonym) was an over-age student who had past academic problems. She selected the drafting program, one of the most difficult programs of study. She had been advised to take something less rigorous because she was thought to be dyslexic. But Carmen disregarded this advice and enrolled in the drafting program. The original tutor for the pilot program, who later became the director of the district program, described Carmen's work at the career center:

> Carmen is my superstar. When she got into the technical drafting program, once I saw the terminology involved in the computer-aided drafting applications, I thought, "Here is a young lady with very limited English proficiency—might even be dyslexic—who might be overwhelmed by this program." I suggested to her a few times that maybe she should consider a different area [of study]. But she said she could do it. That desire and persistence on her part has enabled her to be very successful. Right now in her second year, she is carrying an 84 average. And that is in a class you and I—knowledgeable, educated, and fluent speakers of English—would have problems with. She really made me eat my words.
>
> Carmen is involved in an internship program now. This is her second year. They are allowed to get into an internship program or a shadowing program where they apply the skills they have learned. Carmen is an intern with the water company, and the reports back from her supervisor are that he is really impressed with the work she has done. Much of it is advanced level. One of her designs is actually being considered for one of the new outlying developments being set up in El Paso County. (Interview, May 7, 1997)

All of the students in the career center program, with the exception of one, fit a similar profile. They were over-age students with low levels of English proficiency who were considered at-risk of not graduating from high school. Like most recent-immigrant high school students, they were pushed to learn English quickly enough to master the academic content required to pass the state exit test for graduation.

All of the students in the career center program did well and reported that they would recommend the program to others. During interviews, students consistently commented on the differences between the 50-minute classes at their high schools and classes at the career center. The first hour or less of class at the career center was spent observing a demonstration of how to design, construct, or repair something. During the next two hours, students applied or practiced what had been demonstrated. While they worked, students sat at tables and talked. In general, students earned higher grades at the career center where classes were conducted in English than

they did in their high school sheltered-English classes. Some felt they had more opportunities to use English at the career center than in more traditionally structured high school classes, which emphasized reading and writing targeted at acquiring knowledge for the state accountability test.

"Armando" (pseudonym) was an 18-year-old, 11th grade student who studied metal trades. He described the classes at the career center (or "Tech") as being more like workplaces than classrooms:

> At Tech, one does not feel like a student, but rather like a worker. One has more freedom of expression and can talk to the teacher or move around. The relationship between the teacher and students is more like one between co-workers or a boss and his workers.
>
> I like it better at Tech because we really get to do work, and when the three hours are up, you say, "Wow, the time really flew. I wish we could stay here another three hours." Here [at the high school] we spend the majority of our time reading and writing and doing calculations. There, when you see something you've done, you say, "The effort I put forth, it turned into a piece of work." You see the effort that was invested in that piece of work. You can put what you made on a table and then say, "Well, here is something that I invested some effort in. I also invested time and that time was well spent." (Interview, May 6, 1997)

Of the five students in the pilot program, one passed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test and received a high school diploma in addition to a certification in drafting. The program gave all students opportunities to learn that facilitated their successful entry into the workforce.

Newcomers' Centers are special programs that prepare recent-immigrant students for mainstream classrooms through a program of intensive instruction in English, academic content, if necessary, and the elements of U.S. culture and schooling. Specialists in language assessment and the evaluation of education transcripts from students' countries of origin test students' language proficiency and academic knowledge and make recommendations for placement in an appropriate program of study. The two most common models for secondary newcomers programs are (1) a self-contained, full-day, year-long program, and (2) a two-year program involving half-day attendance at the newcomers center and half-day attendance at the middle school or high school. A school district with a large numbers of recent-immigrant students may have a single center that serves all of the district's recent immigrants. A newcomer's center can be located at the student's primary school or, in the case of a district center, be housed at one school that serves the whole district.

The types of students served in a newcomer's center vary depending on the needs of the particular immigrant population. Some centers target all recent-immigrant students, whereas others, at the high school level for example, address only students who are over-age and who have a gap of several years in their education background. The latter situation is common for students who have completed the required number of years of schooling in their native country

but who wish to enroll in school in the United States to learn English. This is also the profile of immigrant students from rural areas who leave school after third or fourth grade to work.

Curriculum models for newcomers centers also vary widely, but primarily consist of intensified ESL classes and sheltered-English content-area instruction (Chang, 1990). Native language literacy also is part of the curriculum for programs that serve nonliterate recent-immigrant students when teachers are proficient in students' native language. When students share the same native language background, many programs initially are taught in the students' language to teach elements of U.S. culture and the culture of the school and to supplement sheltered English content-area instruction.

The newcomers center at the project high school targeted over-age recent-immigrant students who had a gap of at least three years in their education background. The student population was comprised primarily of students who had recently emigrated from Mexico. Students spent one year in the center and received no credit toward graduation. They then completed a four-semester sequence of ESL classes prior to joining English-only classes.

The newcomers' curriculum at the project high school was written by the newcomer center's teacher, who is fluent in Spanish and, at that point, had taught ESL for 26 years. The curriculum was interdisciplinary and integrated thematically to maximize students' exposure to academic content. Initial instruction focused on developing students' Spanish language and literacy skills. Then the focus shifted to English. Given the gaps in students' education, a print-rich environment (both in Spanish and English) was used to expand their knowledge base.

Describing the curriculum development process, the teacher at the newcomers' center stated:

> We had certain goals that were established before the curriculum was developed. One of the goals, for example, was to create a school-to-work theme, so there is a lot of reference within the document to preparing kids to understand what it means to get out into the job force. The curriculum also has themes appropriate for children arriving in the United States for the first time: getting to know their city, making contrasts between their home country and their new country, learning about social etiquette—acceptable behavior for school and out in the community. The curriculum also involves exposing students to as many activities and experiences as possible, such as attending cultural events, going to museums, touring local universities, etc. (Interview, May 7, 1997)

The successful programs described in this section were not created from a recipe or prescription for how to design successful programs. Rather, they resulted from the voluntary collaborative efforts of local educators, representatives from businesses, and volunteers from other community-based organizations who assessed needs, crafted a vision, and advocated for recent-immigrant students to increase their opportunities to learn.

Conclusion

Education is moving from an emphasis on federal directives to state control. Although federal education policy in part laid the groundwork for the standards movement, it has been up to the states to determine how standards-based education will play out at the local level. Many of the reform efforts underway in the states preceded or occurred at the same time that national standards efforts were initiated. Thus, national content standards may or may not play a role in the implementation of state and local reform efforts. However, since national-level standards *may* play a role in state and local efforts, it is important to note that these documents tend to provide little direction in how standards should be reached. Although the expressed principle underlying each set of content standards is that—all children can achieve world-class standards—no description is offered of how different groups of children are expected to perform.

In general, states have followed the national lead in developing reform plans by emphasizing that "all children are able to achieve high standards," but little attention has been given to addressing the needs of special groups. For example, Kentucky and South Carolina, which are at the forefront of reform efforts, have small LEP populations. These states have no provisions regarding LEP achievement and no mechanisms to track their progress. Conversely, in states with large LEP populations, such as California, LEP students were not taken into account when curriculum frameworks were developed. Another problematic issue that hinders comparisons of LEP students' achievement is that some states with large numbers of LEP students do not include them in accountability testing. Reasons for doing this range from disputing the validity of the test scores of students who do not fully understand the language of the test, to excluding LEP students' scores, to artificially inflating overall test score averages.

For the last ten years, the reform movement has been occupied with two activities: (1) setting standards and (2) assessing progress toward them. These have been relatively easy tasks for schools and districts compared to what they must now address—providing all children with equal opportunities to learn identified standards. The third National Education Summit, held in the fall of 1999, identified opportunity-to-learn standards as one of three important issues remaining in the standards-based reform movement.

The Improving America's Schools Acts (IASA) reference to "all children" must be taken seriously. Recent-immigrant students have unique needs that must be addressed, in part by opportunity-to-learn standards. This paper has articulated a number of issues that must be addressed by such opportunity-to-learn standards for recent immigrant and LEP students. Similar taxonomies need to be developed for other categories of at-risk students. Leadership around this issue is essential for educational excellence for all to become a reality.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT'S ROLE IN HELPING HIGH-POVERTY SCHOOLS BECOME HIGH PERFORMING

by

Douglas Mac Iver, Ph.D.
and
Robert Balfanz, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

A fundamental tenet of the standards-based movement is that all students can meet challenging standards. This belief, however, will remain wishful thinking unless schools find ways to consistently create high-quality learning opportunities and supportive environments that promote high levels of learning in every classroom every day. What is the school district's role in helping schools create and sustain these conditions? What support systems do districts need to build? In short, how can districts build an infrastructure that will help their schools become high performing? This monograph offers research-based answers to these questions.

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INTRODUCTION

A disproportionate number of poor children and children of color fall through the cracks in America's school districts. They achieve less and drop out more than their wealthier and paler counterparts. . . . If school districts are determined to improve the performance of every single child—and not just measures of their collective performance—then they will not only have to make clear their expectations but also supply the supportive environment that prevents students from settling for less. Otherwise, the inspiring charge "that all children can succeed" will ring hollow indeed (Corbett, Wilson, & Williams, 1997, pp. 4, 68).

"What should all students know and be able to do?" This question has guided the standards-based reform movement that has swept the United States since the late 1980s (see, e.g., National Center for History in the

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Organizations of Schools, has ten years of experience in the research, development, design and implementation of mathematics curriculum. His research interests include sociology, economics, and cognitive science. A central concern of both his research and curriculum work is to find ways to ensure that at-risk students obtain and develop the mathematical knowledge they need to succeed in both school and life. His is co-author of an innovative elementary mathematics curriculum—Everyday Mathematics— produced by the University of Chicago Schools Mathematics Project (UCSMP). In the course of developing the curriculum, he helped survey and analyze the mathematics performance of students who were at risk, and worked directly with them in classrooms. He has considerable experience translating research findings into effective classroom interventions. This work includes synthesizing research literature, surveying student abilities, conducting teaching experience, piloting curricular materials, collaborating with teachers, and designing and writing curriculum. He is familiar with current issues and research in assessment, the sociology of classroom organization, curriculum design, and cognitive science. Dr. Balfanz is the developer of the Talent Development Middle School Mathematics Program and co-developer and author of the Talent Development High School's Transition to Advanced Mathematics course for 9th grade students who enter high school with poor prior preparations and low motivations for success in advanced high school mathematics.

Schools, 1994; National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association, 1995; National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 1989; National Education Goals Panel, 1994; Project 2061, American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1993). The goal of the movement is to spell out what students should learn, to ensure consistency across classrooms and schools in teachers' expectations of what students should learn and how well they should learn it, and "to hold school systems, schools, administrators, and teachers accountable for students performing at standard" (Mizell, 1998, p. vii). To date, however, standards-based reform efforts have proven insufficient to help low-performing schools serving poor and minority students turn themselves around and become beacons of improvement characterized by large numbers of students who meet the standards.

The standards-based movement will likely be judged a failure unless schools find ways to systematically provide high-level learning opportunities and support to all their students. School districts will play a critical role in this process, but there is no clear consensus on what specifically that role should entail.

The Big Question: What Is the School District's Role in Helping Schools Become High Performing?

This paper considers guidelines for educators who want to take an active role in promoting and sustaining high-performing schools. The guidelines offered are based on current school reform literature and on the experience of the Talent Development Middle School Project (Mac Iver, Mac Iver, Balfanz, Plank, & Ruby, in press) and the Talent

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Development High School Project (McPartland, Balfanz, Jordan, & Legters, 1998)[1]. This paper first briefly considers the conditions that research findings and experience tell us promote students' motivation to learn and academic achievement. This discussion is followed by a critical examination of the small body of literature that explores the role of the school district in developing, promoting, and sustaining high-performing schools. The final section draws on this critique and the experience of the Talent Development Project to offer suggestions concerning the role school districts can play in helping all students achieve. It also proposes a five-way partnership among schools, school districts, external design teams, local reform organizations, and foundations as one mechanism through which systematic gains in academic achievement can be realized.

Guiding Question # 1: What Conditions at the School and Classroom Level Promote High Levels Of Learning?

Research has identified a number of conditions that promote high levels of academic achievement for students from all backgrounds. In general, the key to producing high-performing schools is systematically and consistently working to create and sustain an environment in which all students have the motivation and opportunity to learn. Research suggests the following:

1. At the student level, motivation and opportunity to learn are increased when

   a. a common, core, standards-based curriculum that is coherent, consistent, and increasingly complex and challenging across grade levels is effectively implemented schoolwide (see, e.g., Schmidt, 1998; Lee, Croninger, & Smith, 1997; Schmidt, McKnight, & Raizen, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Balfanz, 1997; Balfanz, Mac Iver, & Ryan, 1999)

   b. instructional strategies that maximize "teaching for meaning," motivation to learn, and peer support for learning are used (Wang, 1998; Harris, Graham, & Deshler, 1998; Mac Iver, Plank, & Balfanz, 1997; Mac Iver & Plank, 1996; Knapp, 1995)

   c. strong and supportive student-teacher bonds (Arhar, 1997; Mac Iver & Prioleau, 1999; McLaughlin & Doda, 1997; Wenglinsky 1997; Lee, 1997) and well-managed classrooms (McCollum, 1995; Corbett & Wilson, 1997) are developed

[1]The Talent Development Middle School is a rigorously evaluated national whole-school reform model developed by researchers, educators, and experienced curriculum writers at Johns Hopkins University in collaboration with middle school practitioners. It contains eight fundamental components that transform a school into a high-performance learning community by establishing the standards-driven curriculum, instruction, school organization, and professional development needed in order for all students to learn challenging academic materials and to prepare for successful futures. The model is currently being implemented in nine middle schools in Philadelphia, Detroit, and Memphis.

d. extra help for all students who need it is effectively delivered (Mac Iver, Balfanz, & Plank, 1999; Mac Iver, 1991)

e. students understand what they need to do to realize their educational, occupational, and life aspirations (Mac Iver & Plank, 1997a)

f. strategic school-family-community partnerships support student learning at school, at home, and in the community (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1996; Brough, 1997; Schine, 1998)

2. Each teacher's ability to create an environment that helps motivate students and gives them strong opportunities to learn is enhanced when

a. teachers participate in sustained, focused, and curriculum-specific staff development that shows them how to successfully use new and more-demanding curriculum materials; enables them to learn effective instructional strategies; and provides them with the content knowledge they need (Research Advisory Committee, 1998; Cohen, Wilson, & Hill, 1997; Ball & Cohen, 1995; Chubb, 1997; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995)

b. teachers receive in-class implementation support (e.g., modeling, peer coaching, troubleshooting, and help getting the materials they need) from a respected and able peer in a non-evaluatory setting (Knapp, Shields, & Turnbull, 1995; Useem, 1998)

c. the school is organized into small learning communities (McPartland, Balfanz, Jordan, & Legters, 1998; Galletti, 1998) and other organizational strategies (e.g., semi-departmentalization, looping, common planning periods) are used to create opportunities for strong, positive student-teacher and teacher-teacher bonds to develop (Mac Iver & Prioleau, 1999; McLaughlin & Doda, 1997; Mac Iver & Plank, 1997b; Useem,1998)

d. teachers have support and some freedom to customize and localize the organization of teaching, instruction, and curriculum (Clark & Clark, 1997; National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, 1995, 1996; Lampert & Eshelman, 1995; Little, 1993; LeMahieu & Sterling, 1991)

e. teachers receive continual feedback on how their students are doing (Palmaffy,1998; Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Falk, 1995) and on the strengths and weaknesses of different instructional approaches (Saphier & Gower, 1997)

3. Each school's ability to create an environment in which all students and teachers can teach and learn at high levels is enhanced when

a. there is a school-wide commitment to help students become proficient and meet standards (National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform, 1998; Schools to Watch Committee, 1998; Palmaffy, 1998; Wilson & Corbett, 1999)

b. principals strongly, continually, and visibly support this effort and reorganize the schools' resources (i.e., time, people, money) to enable that effort (Wohlstetter, Mohrman, & Robertson, 1997; Mizell, 1994)

c. principals provide instructional leadership and support to ensure that strong learning opportunities and motivation exist in every classroom in the school (Knapp, Shields, & Padilla, 1995)

d. a second tier of supportive, well-informed, and coordinated leadership (e.g., vice principals, small learning community leaders, and school improvement teams) is developed at the school (Mac Iver et al., in press)

e. all key stakeholders are kept informed of progress and problems and have a forum for giving input and for influencing the school's reform efforts (Mizell, 1994; Bryk, Kerbow, & Rollow, 1997)

f. the school staff gathers and uses data in an intelligent and informed manner to make decisions (Schools to Watch Committee, 1998; Wohlstetter, Mohrman, & Robertson, 1997)

Guiding Question #2: What is the District's Role in Creating and Sustaining These Conditions?

Although considerable progress has been made in identifying the conditions that systematically promote high levels of learning across classrooms and schools, the role that school districts can and should play in creating and supporting high-performing learning environments remains under-conceptualized and under-researched. Effective district-level support, however, is critical. Without it, reform efforts cannot move beyond isolated islands of excellence at the classroom and school level to create powerful school systems that educate all students.

The District's Role in Setting Standards, Performance Goals, and Accountability Frameworks

There is broad agreement about two functions school districts can and should fulfill: setting high performance standards, and developing and enforcing an accountability framework (Palmaffy, 1998; Archbald, 1998). Odden and Hill (1997) capture this consensus in the following observation:

> Developing a mission statement that states student achievement in the core academic subjects is the top priority of the district, creating content and

> performance standards that give specific meaning to that mission, and then deploying a system that measures results and can be used to set specific targets, are critical district responsibilities. (p. 8)

According to this consensus, districts need assessment systems that are criterion referenced, aligned with specific standards of performance, provide baseline data, and report progress over time in meeting goals (see Odden & Hill, 1997). In addition, there is growing consensus that accurate assessments of a school's effectiveness require "value-added" assessment systems "that consider the *gains in achievement* made by students at each grade in the school for each year," rather than focusing exclusively on the average achievement levels at each grade level (Bryk, Thum, Easton, and Luppescu, 1998, p. 23).

Almost without exception, state and federal government officials, parents, leaders of professional organizations, and representatives from departments of education agree on the importance of standards and accountability.[2] Standards and accountability frameworks can be created by a small number of people, enacted legislatively, and pointed to as significant state and district accomplishments. In short, states and districts have the power, the will, and capacity to create these frameworks. In fact, most school districts have recently adopted local or state standards or implemented a new accountability framework (Wheelock, 1998).

Despite general agreement on the need for districts to set standards and enforce accountability and despite the fact that much progress has been made in both of these areas, we are in an era of experimentation and learning (Newmann, King, & Rigdon, 1997; Archbald, 1998). The details and the relative effectiveness of different approaches and frameworks remain unknown. For example, we do not know if it is important for districts to write their own standards and design their own criterion-referenced tests (as some districts are planning to do) or if similar returns can be achieved in a shorter amount of time at a lower cost by adopting state or national standards and using state, national (e.g., NAEP), international (e.g., TIMSS), or commercially developed standardized tests (e.g., the Stanford-9). Similarly, although "a wide range of incentive structures offers hope for improving schools . . . existing knowledge about incentive systems tells us neither which forms are best nor what results we might expect from broader use of any specific system" (Hanushek, 1997, pp. 306-307).

In sum, the literature about school reform makes a strong case that districts can and should promote the development of high-performing schools by (1) making the attainment of high levels of student learning in the core academic subjects a primary goal, (2) making this goal concrete by developing or adopting clearly spelled out and measurable content standards and performance goals, and (3) linking content standards and performance goals to an assessment system that clearly measures students' achievement and progress on a yearly basis at the school level and links this achievement and progress to performance goals, rewards, and sanctions. Initial results from Kentucky, Texas, and Philadelphia indicate that taking these steps can

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[2]Poll data gathered by Public Agenda, for example, indicate that 82 percent of parents "favor setting explicit guidelines for what students should know and teachers should teach. Eighty-eight percent say that students should not be allowed to graduate unless they demonstrate a clear command of English, and nearly as many [87 percent] would set higher standards in math, history, English, and science for promotion to a higher grade" (Wadsworth, 1998, p. 3).

translate into achievement gains across a broad spectrum of schools (Palmaffy, 1998; D. Hornbeck, 1998).

The District's Role in Supporting and Governing Schools: Misplaced Focus on Governance?

Developing a mission statement, spelling out learning goals, devising an assessment system that measures students' progress, and creating a system of rewards and sanctions to motivate progress toward the goals, however, are only initial steps. At the district level, the hard part of reform is figuring out how to systematically help create, support, and sustain the high-performing learning environments that result in broad-based gains in academic achievement at the school and classroom levels.

Here there is no consensus. At one end of the spectrum are those who argue that districts should do little more than set standards and enforce accountability and let schools figure out how to best achieve local goals. At the other end of the spectrum, the argument is that district leaders should strongly and actively enforce common approaches for district schools. A few proposals take the middle ground in advocating that innovative district support systems be built.

Much of the literature that addresses the role school districts should play in creating high-performing schools focuses on the issue of governance. This literature is based on two mutually reinforcing but conceptually distinct approaches to school reform: (1) site-based management and (2) using whole school reform models, reform networks, and outside contracting. More often than not in this literature, school districts are seen as the problem, not the solution.

Site-Based Management and Decentralization

A large body of literature has been produced by proponents of site-based management and decentralized school districts. The general argument presented by proponents is that the people who are in the best position to create and sustain high-performing learning environments are the people who are closest to teaching and learning: classroom teachers, school administrators, and parents. The theory of site-based management is that the individuals who work in, run, and send their children to school will develop the most effective and lasting strategies for improvement if they are free from district constraints but held accountable for high standards (Mohrman & Wohlstetter, 1994).

Proponents of different approaches to site-based management and decentralized school districts posit slightly different roles for districts, but in all cases maintain that the district's role should be limited (Bryk, 1998; Wohlstetter, Mohrman, & Robertson, 1997; Odden & Hill, 1997). Odden & Hill, for example, argue that teachers and school administrators should have real authority and power over their day-to-day operations in exchange for being held to high performance standards.

Specifically, Odden and Hill (1997) argue that the success of site-based management hinges on districts granting decision-making power (e.g., over the allocation of financial and

human resources) and creating a variety of support systems (e.g., a well-funded, ongoing professional development program and clearly identified rewards and sanctions). Odden and Hill also maintain that district leaders can support site-based management by creating awareness of the need for fundamental change and funding one-time expenses (e.g., to create a rich information system, a technology infrastructure, and a leadership training program and to fund start-up costs of whole school reform models).

Hill's (1998) vision of site-based management goes further. He argues that the district's role in providing support to schools struggling to improve should be severely limited and that district central offices should almost cease to exist:

> Each school should operate under a specific agreement—a contract—between itself and the school board. This contract should define each school's mission, guarantee of public funding, and grounds for accountability.
>
> Families would choose schools and over-subscribed schools would be filled on a lottery basis. Schools would receive public funds "real dollars" on a per pupil basis, and use the funds to hire teachers, buy instructional materials, and provide all other services. The local public school board and central office would lack the authority or administrative capacity to micromanage schools or compete with school staff members for control of curriculum, instructional methods, in-service training, or teacher selection and evaluation. . . .
>
> Central offices would not employ large numbers of staff development, curriculum, or compliance specialists. They would, however, employ people capable of helping schools gain access to independent sources of help in such areas. (pp. 20-25)

However, the movement to decentralize schools is driven by theory rather than research. Authors advocating this approach typically point to high-performing organizations in other fields that are organized around this model. They also cite a number of schools and a few districts that have had some success with decentralization and site-based management (Palmaffy, 1998; Bryk, 1998; Wohlstetter, Mohrman, & Robertson, 1997). However, much of the evidence supporting site-based management is based on experiences at elementary schools. Even some of decentralization's strongest proponents concede that site-based management has had less of a positive effect on large secondary schools. In reviewing the role of decentralization in recent academic achievement gains in Texas, Palmaffy (1998) writes, "While many elementary-school pupils . . . have little trouble climbing to a higher rating, high schools and to a lesser degree, middle schools, have proven more intransigent" (p. 38). Similarly, Wohlstetter, Mohrman, and Robertson (1997) write:

> Many of the successful examples in our research, and other studies as well, occurred in relatively small schools. The large, segmented high schools with several thousand students experience great difficulty in establishing the conditions of high involvement and learning dynamics. (p. 224)

Those who are skeptical that site-based management is the answer to the problem of low-performing urban schools point to districts and schools where decentralization and site-based management were accompanied by declines in student achievement and the replacement of effective programs with ineffective fads (Lemann, 1998; Bowler, 1998). These skeptics suggest that many school leaders and their faculties are incapable of turning around troubled schools without intensive support and guidance. They also argue that nonperforming schools should be recentralized and required to "institute a prescribed curriculum that has been carefully researched and field-tested and has been proven to work" (Lemann, 1998, p. 104). To date, although many districts have turned toward decentralization and site-based management in their reform efforts, there is little empirical evidence to suggest that decentralization will lead to the systematic creation of high-performing schools across multiple, diverse schools and districts (Wohlstetter, Mohrman, & Robertson, 1997).

Why Site-Based Management May Not Work . The decentralization movement's rhetoric suggests that returning decision making to local schools will ensure that a hundred beautiful wildflowers will bloom. But the reality is that this strategy does little to improve education. As articulated by Mizell (2000), one reason the reality does not match the rhetoric is that many school boards and superintendents use site-based management as an excuse for why they cannot provide more forceful leadership for reform. They say they cannot act because under site-based management key decisions are reserved to the schools. Schools say they cannot act because, in fact, the central office exercises more authority than it claims. The result is a leadership stalemate that stifles rather than stimulates. (p. 2)

Our experience with middle schools and high schools in two large, urban, northeastern school districts, as well as contact with a number of other schools, suggests that instead of comparing site-based-managed schools to wildflowers, a more apt metaphor is to compare these schools to small businesses. Schools that are free from district support and guidance are as likely to fail as to succeed for the same reasons that most small businesses fail: lack of resources, lack of technical knowledge, and unstable operating environments.

Lack of resources. Our work has shown that the human resources (e.g., leadership skills, time for collaborative work, and subject-matter knowledge) in high-poverty schools are not strong enough to accomplish fundamental and lasting reform without the help of others. For example, one of the most pressing problems we have encountered in urban secondary schools is lack of instructional leadership. School administrators who have been given more responsibility through site-based management, but not more resources, can be overwhelmed by the non-instructional demands of running a school. In addition, few have the technical knowledge to provide leadership in multiple subject areas.

A central element of many decentralized school plans is teacher collaboration, but collaboration takes time, and time is a limited commodity. Finding and scheduling sufficient time for collaboration is very difficult (Adelman, Walking Eagle, & Hargreaves, 1997). Teachers need to meet both as small learning communities (e.g., as interdisciplinary teaching teams) and by subject area. Both types of meetings are essential in a site-based-managed school (Wohlstetter, Mohrman, & Robertson, 1997).

Recent research based on the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS) (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999), data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (Hawkins, Stancavage, & Dossey, 1998), and multiple other sources (Monk, 1994; Ingersoll, 1998) strongly indicates that teachers' subject-area preparation and knowledge is a critical variable in student learning, particularly in math and science. This research also documents a large shortage of teachers who have a strong base of knowledge and skills in math and science, particularly in urban areas. Recent state-level drives to lower class size may further exacerbate this situation in urban schools by increasing the suburban demand for teachers. Thus, decentralized urban schools will need to develop and sustain effective, ongoing, and rather sophisticated training programs. Otherwise, like small businesses that are unable to find, retain, and train skilled employees in a competitive market, they will fail.

Lack of technical knowledge. A school's capacity to select or develop its own curriculum, instructional approaches, professional development program, and organizational structures depends on the availability of a ready and easily accessible supply of technical knowledge in each of these areas. However, many teachers do not have the necessary knowledge in these areas (Wohlstetter, Mohrman, & Robertson, 1997), nor is this knowledge readily available from other sources.

The development of large-scale, systematic collaborative planning structures at the school level conflicts with the existing culture of teaching in the United States, which is individualistic and often necessarily focused on the short term. In our experience, it is the uncommon teacher leader, subject-area coordinator, program support teacher, or Title I resource teacher who thinks and acts programmatically and strategically. Instead, their efforts are focused on the near term and on the needs of individual teachers. This culture is an obstacle to the success of school-level approaches to developing effective curricula, instructional strategies, organizational systems, and professional development programs.

An unstable operating environment. Teachers and administrators in urban schools are highly mobile. At the middle school level, teachers change grades, subject areas, and schools in large numbers every year. Administrators also move often. The nation's first Talent Development Middle school and High School both had five principals in four years. This makes it very difficult for individual schools to build and sustain strong instructional programs.

In spite of these arguments against viewing decentralization as the key to school improvement, there are elements of this approach (e.g., giving schools control over their budgets and staff) that may facilitate systematic reform. But realizing systematic gains in academic achievement through decentralization will be very difficult. This will especially be the case in large urban districts, which tend to be viewed by advocates of decentralization as the districts that most urgently need new governance structures. In order to use a decentralization approach effectively, schools will have to overcome a number of systematic, structural, and cultural barriers, including lack of instructional leadership, insufficient time, too few teachers who have strong subject-area backgrounds, a culture of individualism, and the constant mobility of professional staff.

This leaves two unanswered questions for proponents of decentralization. First, where will schools find the financial resources to address the structural and cultural barriers that are likely to arise? Proponents of decentralized schools often imply that their reforms are "cost neutral"—that they can be funded by simply reallocating existing funds. But decreasing staff loads to provide teachers with the time they need for collaboration or increasing salaries to attract and retain teachers with strong math and science backgrounds are not "cost neutral" approaches. Second, who will provide the support and guidance needed to develop curricula, set up and sustain a professional development infrastructure, and help stabilize the school staff? Proponents of decentralized schools often assume that schools will receive the support, assistance, and guidance they need to become high-performing institutions by engaging with externally developed whole school reform models, reform networks, and outside contractors. As we argue in the next section, however, there are not enough fully developed and demonstrably effective external models, contractors, and networks to provide all—or even most—high-poverty schools with the support they need to become high performing. Furthermore, districts will always have an important role to play in shaping and supporting partnerships between effective models and local schools.

Externally Developed Whole School Reform Models, Reform Networks, and Outside Contractors

The movement to reform schools through the use of externally developed whole school reform models (e.g., the New American School Designs or the Talent Development Model), reform networks (e.g., the Coalition of Essential Schools), and outside contractors (e.g., the Edison Project) is often associated with the movement to decentralize schools. But these movements are conceptually distinct. For example, over the past decade, a number of largely centralized school districts (e.g., Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Memphis) have attempted, with mixed levels of success, to use externally developed whole school reform models, reform networks, and outside contractors as critical elements of their overall reform plans (Ascher, Fruchter, & Berne, 1996; Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996; Useem, Culbertson, & Buchanan, 1997; Stringfield & Datnow, 1998).

The theory behind the comprehensive school reform movement is that schools need external guidance, models, and direction in order to reform. Existing research tends to support this notion. In general, externally developed models have been more widely implemented and resulted in higher gains than home-grown reform efforts (Stringfield, Datnow, Herman, & Berkeley, 1997). Schools are having a particularly difficult time developing their own approaches to reform given the time and resources they must spend to help an increasingly diverse student population meet higher standards (Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990). Few schools currently have the infrastructure and skilled staff needed to provide strong support and learning opportunities to diverse student populations (Stringfield, 1995).

Because the use of externally developed whole school reform models is still in its infancy, little literature is available that provides guidance on how to make good use of this approach. Slavin (1998) lays out one possible method. He suggests that districts:

- identify a set of models that will be offered to schools;

- determine what the district will need to do to support the successful implementation of the models (e.g., provide additional funds, extra training days, waivers from regulations);
- determine how the models fit with the district's larger reform strategy;
- identify the schools that will given an opportunity to implement external models;
- help these schools learn about each of the models so that each school's staff can make an informed choice;
- make sure that each school works closely with the developers of the model that it has chosen to lay the groundwork for a strong implementation; and
- design a process for evaluating the success of the model.

The New American Schools (NAS) organization has identified guiding principles for districts that want their schools to adopt NAS's models. Initially, most of the NAS design teams focused on achieving school-level buy-in and did not sufficiently involve districts in implementation efforts. Over time, however, "NAS came to see its initiative as involving district-level interventions, as well as the activities of the design teams" (Glennan, 1998, p. 35), and "has devoted increasing attention to helping jurisdictions develop what it terms a 'supportive operating environment'" (p. xii). Glennan describes this supportive operating environment at the district level as including

- an effective process for matching schools with appropriate designs,
- an effective process for helping schools find the resources needed to implement these designs,
- a governance structure that gives schools the authority to implement designs,
- an accountability system that reports the progress of each student and of each school in meeting performance targets, and
- a means for coordinating professional development policies and design-based assistance.

Taken together, Slavin and NAS provide districts with sensible advice for introducing and supporting externally developed whole school reform models. However, as evaluation initiatives make clear (see, e.g., Glennan, 1998, for the RAND evaluation of NAS; see Stringfield & Datnow, 1998, and Datnow & Stringfield, 1997, for an ongoing evaluation of whole school reform models in Memphis; and see Useem, Christman, Gold, & Simon, 1997, for an analysis of the impact of nine professional development initiatives in Philadelphia), districts seeking to develop high-performing schools through the use of externally developed whole

school reform models, reform networks, and outside contractors need to overcome several additional challenges.

For example, the RAND evaluation of NAS states that "many of the jurisdictions lacked the skills and knowledge to embark upon the changes required" by the NAS designs (Glennan, 1998, p. 30). Moreover, in many districts, successful implementation was impeded by funding crises, difficult labor negotiations, or a lack of support from district leaders.

In a recent Twentieth Century Fund report on public schools and privatization, Asher, Fruchter, and Berne (1996) sound a similar note of caution in their review of school districts' use of outside contractors. In particular, their examination of the Education Alternatives Inc. (EAI)[3] privatization experiment in Baltimore shows that there is often a tenuous and uneasy fit between district expectations and the visions and abilities of outside contractors (Chubb, 1997).

In short, external reform organizations and outside contractors have run up against entrenched practices, organizational weaknesses, and competing visions, which have undercut their ability to implement their designs. Useem, Christman, Gold, and Simon (1997) report a similar phenomenon for local reform networks and initiatives. In an analysis of the fate of nine separate professional development initiatives, they identify a cluster of policies and structures that "converge to prevent or break up the norms, networks, and social trust required for reforms to take root" (p. 55). Among the most detrimental challenges Useem, Christman, Gold, and Simon identify are high rates of principal turnover and high rates of turnover among the teachers who participated in the professional development programs. They also point to work rules in teacher's union contracts that fragment and separate school staffs and constrain opportunities for sustained collegial work, as well as transfer policies, which disrupt collegial relations.

The combination of a truly decentralized school system and external reform models might provide a route around entrenched district customs and procedures that weaken reform efforts. However, this strategy still does not address the problems caused by high teacher and administrator mobility and the lack of sufficient time and energy at the school level for deeply collaborative work. For example, the RAND evaluation of NAS (Glennan, 1998) states that "teachers have widely complained about the amount of time and effort they must devote to design implementation above and beyond the commitments they have to their regular duties" (p. 28) (see also Bol et al., 1998).

Capacity is another equally significant problem, at least in the near- to mid-term, that stands in the way of using externally developed whole school reform models, reform networks, and outside contractors as the central vehicle for creating high-performing schools. The RAND evaluation, the Memphis study, and our own experience reveal that whole school reform is a labor-intensive and prolonged process. Simply providing a school with a blueprint for reform, an organizing structure, some initial training, and membership in a larger network is often not enough. Crandall and Loucks (1983, cited in Bol et al., 1998) state that "new practices entailing a significant amount of change live or die by the amount of personnel assistance they receive" (p.

[3]Baltimore hired this private firm to run nine of its schools.

360). For many schools, a near-permanent infrastructure of support will have to be built. Without this, it is unlikely that sustained change will occur (Balfanz, 1997, in press).

Currently, there are not enough viable whole school reform organizations or effective programs of sufficient size and scope to provide support at this level to more than a small fraction of the schools that might benefit from assistance. Slavin (1998), for example, lays out the following criteria for selecting effective programs:

- Each should have been rigorously evaluated in comparison to traditional control groups on measures of achievement, and found to be markedly more effective.
- Each should have available trainers, materials, assessments, and other supports to enable schools to readily replicate the model.
- Each should have a track record of working in urban districts and Title 1 schools.
- Each should be available and affordable to a large proportion of the district's schools. (p. 3)

These stringent criteria filter out most of the existing whole school reform models, reform networks, and outside contractors. To date, fewer than 50 whole school reform models have demonstrated some evidence of success. Only a handful of these models appear to be able to effectively and continually support more than a dozen schools. Moreover, most of these programs are currently limited to one level of schooling—elementary, middle, or high school—and have a vision that may or may not be compatible with a given district's goals and objectives. In particular, few models have been designed with urban secondary schools in mind (McPartland et al., 1998; Mac Iver et al., in press).

Most of the promising design models have been hindered by a lack of trained staff who can provide technical assistance to schools. As of the fall of 1997, NAS designs were being implemented in 475 schools in the 11 jurisdictions where NAS was concentrating its efforts (see Glennan, 1988), which translates to an average of 26 percent of the schools in each district. By 1998, 1,000 schools in 31 states were using a NAS design. The Edison Project, which to date has been the most successful attempt at outside contracting for whole school reform, was operating 50 schools as of the fall of 1998.

A generous estimate is that there are 3,000-4,000 schools attempting to implement an externally developed whole school reform design. Our understanding of the difficulties of implementation, however, leads us to estimate that as many as half of these reform efforts will fail (Glennan, 1998; Stringfield & Datnow, 1998). This means that externally developed whole school reform designs might currently have the capacity to successfully reform and sustain improvements in 1,500-2,000 schools. These numbers are by no means insignificant. In 1996, however,16,800 schools were eligible for schoolwide Title I status (Wong & Meyers, 1998).

Thus, the capacity of organizations that have created whole school reform models will need to be significantly increased before all schools in need can be served effectively.

Recent federal funding for whole school reform is a resource for the implementation of whole school reform designs in additional schools, but this support is limited. The first round of Federal Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program (CSRD) funds have given about 2,500 schools access to whole school reform designs. These funds, for example, provided up to 28 schools in Maryland with an average of $75,000 per year for three years to implement whole school reform designs. Only six of these schools, however, were in Baltimore City, which has over 100 Title I schools and 79 schools that have been declared reconstitution-eligible by the state. Another example of the limited support that federal funding provides is the state of Mississippi. Some $2.2 million in federal funding was received, but in the first round of CSRD applications alone, the state received proposals from 140 schools requesting $9.9 million in funds. In addition, most schools that received funding in the ten states that moved most quickly to distribute funds have been elementary schools (M. Hornbeck, 1998). It appears that the distribution of CSRD funds may follow the pattern established by Title I funding and bypass most of the secondary schools in need (McPartland, 1998).

Externally developed whole school reform models can be an effective tool in a school district's reform strategy. In a later section of this paper, we discuss how these models can serve as a catalyst for change and be used strategically to help schools that have proven resistant to improvement. We will also discuss how they can be used to initiate and support district-wide reforms. Outside of a few districts, however, externally developed whole school reform models cannot be broadly applied in multiple settings as the centerpiece of a district's reform strategy. The existing supply of technical assistance that is so critical to success cannot meet the demand that would be created if scores, let alone hundreds, of school districts sought to systematically link up all or even most of their schools with externally developed whole school designs. Consequently, whole school reform models are not, in and of themselves, the answer to the question of who will supply the technical assistance that schools will need to succeed in a decentralized environment.

The message of decentralization and whole school reform models is that if teachers and school administrators are set free from the constraints of bureaucracy and politics, held to high standards, and able to call upon expert guidance, they can transform their schools into powerful learning institutions. This vision is filled with hope—a precious commodity, particularly in urban school districts, where there is much institutionalized despair and paralysis.

The vision offered by decentralization and whole school reform models is an intoxicating one because it has worked, at least temporarily, in some instances (Wohlstetter, Mohrman, & Robertson, 1997). However, school districts and local control are here to stay, as are the bureaucracy and politics of school reform. This is why it is a mistake to focus too much attention on finding the "proper" governance structure for systematic school reform. In many respects, the never-ending reform of governance structures that characterizes many urban districts is simply the most macro example of what Fred Hess (1999) calls "policy churn." At any given time, it is possible to find different districts claiming that the key to school reform is the adoption of diametrically opposed governance structures. Currently, for example, some cities (e.g.,

Baltimore) claim they are taking the politics out of school reform by decreasing the power and, thus, the responsibility of the mayor; other cities (e.g., Chicago and Cleveland) are claiming that salvation lies in tying the political fortune of the mayor to the success of the city's schools.

The key to the systemwide creation of high-performing learning institutions is *not* finding the right governance structure. In fact, systematic reform is possible under a multitude of structures. The key is to find ways to reliably improve academic achievement in each and every school in a jurisdiction (Stringfield, 1995). School districts are in the best position to do this if they can find a way to develop and sustain a district-wide system of support, direction, and technical assistance that enables all schools to create and maintain strong learning environments.

Guiding Question #3: What Support Systems Do Districts Need to Build?

How can districts build an infrastructure of support that systematically and reliably help schools achieve strong learning environments? Our experience with the Talent Development Model and the existing literature that addresses this question indicate that, at a minimum, districts need to develop systems that fundamentally transform the support that teachers receive, the instructional programs they use, the organizational assistance provided to schools, and the use of data within the district.

Facilitated Instructional Programs

Facilitated instructional programs are a powerful mechanism for systematically creating and sustaining strong learning environments (Useem, 1998; Mac Iver et al., in press). A facilitated instructional program has the following central elements:

1. High-quality standards-based curricula and instructional materials, which teachers in the same subject area teach at a relatively consistent pace

2. An intensive, sustained, and focused professional development program that (1) introduces and models effective instructional strategies that promote active, peer-assisted learning and supportive classroom environments (This is particularly important given the heterogeneous classes many urban teachers face [Balfanz, 1997; Mac Iver, Plank, & Balfanz, 1997]); (2) helps teachers learn the content knowledge they need to effectively use the materials; and (3) serves as a forum for teachers to dialogue about successes, modifications, discoveries, and concerns (Research Advisory Committee, 1998).

3. Highly skilled and respected subject-area specialists—"curriculum coaches"—who provide ongoing in-classroom assistance to teachers during weekly visits to each school. Effective in-classroom implementation support includes peer coaching, team teaching, troubleshooting, giving advice, offering encouragement, and providing a shoulder to lean on. Subject-area facilitators should be people who are respected and recognized by those they support as useful and skilled. They also should be people

who are skilled at assisting others, rather than evaluating them. These qualities are essential to creating a relationship of trust between subject-area facilitators and faculty members (Holton et al., 1998). This is why, in general, department heads or others who have a role in teacher evaluation are not the best candidates for these jobs.

4. Finally, it is important to develop the capacity within each school to sustain the program by training a minimum of two teachers per subject per school to serve as "first call" helpers when teachers need assistance on days that the full-time curriculum coaches are unavailable (because they are serving another school in the network) and as trainers of new teachers within their building. We also believe that, at least initially, it is important that the facilitated instructional program be affiliated with an outside group that can work with the school and the district to help keep the school on track and moving forward, and interface with the school district to develop a supportive environment for the instructional programs.

This multi-tiered, focused approach to teacher support is what is needed to systematically reach all classrooms in a sustained fashion. It is used in one form or another in many, if not all, of the reform programs that have consistently raised student achievement at the whole school level (e.g., Success for All/Roots and Wings and Direct Instruction). It can also be found at the root of many stories that describe how poor schools have transformed themselves into good schools (McHugh & Stringfield, 1998; Palmaffy, 1998).

How to Implement and Sustain a Facilitated Instructional Approach

To effectively implement and sustain a facilitated instructional approach at the district level, school districts will need to do the following:

1. Select a limited number of high-quality standards-based instructional programs, and develop the expertise to support them.

2. Create an infrastructure of support that is strong enough to bring about and sustain classroom change.

3. Ensure that district policies support rather than undercut the effort.

Select High-Quality Instructional Programs

In order to provide high-quality, sustained technical assistance, school districts will have to limit the curricular options that schools have. Most school districts do not have the capacity to develop effective technical assistance for unlimited curricular options. In our experience, districts that have adopted an approach that might be characterized as—"tell us what you need help with and we will see what we can do)—have had far less impact than those who have adopted a more proactive stance, "This is what we can do." However, the exact number of curricula that a specific district can or should support depend on a number of variables (e.g., the size of the district, the skill of the professional development staff, the number of available curricula that are aligned with local standards).

Once the instructional programs have been selected, they may need to be customized so that they are aligned with local standards and assessment instruments. Supplemental teacher materials may also need to be developed. Finally, districts will need to develop a professional development program that helps teachers learn to use a standards-based approach. None of this will happen overnight. The district should be prepared for a two- to three-year development period characterized by field testing, teacher feedback, and revision.

Create an Infrastructure of Support

Districts will need to provide teachers with multiple layers of sustained support that include subject-area facilitators and curriculum-centered professional development. In addition, very-low-performing and disorganized middle and high schools may also need an *organizational* facilitator who can help guide them in creating the organization, schedule, and procedures that support instructional change. This is a much higher level of instructional and organizational support than districts typically have provided.

In addition to providing this level of in-classroom implementation support, school districts will need to institutionalize curriculum-centered professional development --- offering it as long as the instructional program it supports is in use. This is particularly important in districts that have high teacher-mobility rates, elementary-certified middle school teachers, and districts that use a semi-departmentalized middle school model. Unfortunately, institutionalized curriculum-centered professional development is a departure from common practice. Typically, school districts provide professional development (or have publishers provide staff development) only during the year in which a new instructional program is introduced. In our experience, teachers require a minimum of two years of monthly workshops to learn a new instructional program and use it proficiently. As in any profession, further training brings even higher levels of skill. Moreover, the frequency with which middle school teachers change schools and subjects means that schools will always have a significant number of untrained teachers unless staff development is continually provided.

Ensure Policies Support the Effort

Districts need to examine their policies on pay, staffing, and scheduling to ensure they are supportive of the effort. They also must reduce other demands on teachers' time so that teachers have the energy required for instructional change.

One challenge is to get teachers to regularly attend the staff development sessions. In many districts, teachers cannot be contractually obligated to attend after-school, Saturday, and summer sessions. One solution is to link teachers' professional advancement to attendance at professional development sessions. Another solution is to create more professional development time during the school year. Typically, school districts set aside 2-5 days per year for professional development. More flexible and useful arrangements need to be established. These include letting schools bank time (by starting the school day earlier or extending the school year) so they can free up 4-6 hours per month for professional development or increasing the length of the school day (with a subsequent increase in pay) to build in time for ongoing professional development.

Districts will also have to examine their staffing policies to find better ways to recruit and train new teachers and stabilize school staffs. Once a large investment has been made in training a teacher for a particular grade and subject, districts need to make sure that the teacher is not arbitrarily assigned to another grade, subject, or school. Districts also have to establish policies and incentives that make it less likely that low-performing schools will function as a "minor league" training and testing ground for identifying and developing star teachers who are then immediately "promoted" to more selective, high-performing schools in the district (or to schools in the suburbs). Finally, districts may need to increase their professional development budgets to ensure that sufficient resources are available to develop a core of expert local trainers and to give teachers the sustained curriculum-specific support they need.

Organizational Supports for Strong Learning Environments

The implicit assumption of many of the school restructuring efforts launched in the late 1980s and early 1990s that organizational change would lead to sustained instructional reform has been proven wrong (Elmore, Peterson, McCarthey, & McCarthey, 1996). Nonetheless, it is also true that weak organizations can undermine the most powerful instructional changes. Simply put, both instructional change and organizational reform are needed for systematic gains in academic achievement to occur (Bryk, Kerbow, & Rollow, 1997).

To a large extent, effective organizational structures at the student and teacher level have been identified in the middle school literature and have been adopted by a growing number of schools. These include the use of small learning communities, looping, teacher teams, and common planning periods. Less well identified and established are organizational supports at the school and district level. At the school level, administrators need help in learning how to staff and schedule to create a serious learning environment and support effective instructional programs (Legters, 1998). They also need assistance in organizing their staff, students, and parents into a community that supports learning (Legters, in press; McPartland, Balfanz, Jordan, & Legters, 1998). At the school level, procedures also need to be put in place to ensure that materials and supplies are provided to teachers in a timely fashion in sufficient quantities. This may seem like a simple matter, but in the most dysfunctional schools it almost never happens. Finally, efforts need to be made to overcome the social distance that separates teachers and students in many urban schools (Balfanz, in press). Bryk (1998) argues that one of the strongest features of democratic localism—giving local school councils the power to hire and fire principals—is that it forces the school to address the needs of its students.

At the district level, a number of fundamental supports need to be put in place and consistently used. First, districts need to abandon policies and procedures that make it difficult for schools to implement innovations. In particular, they need to support the school-level planning process by providing school leaders with budget information early in the spring and by minimizing the last-minute introduction of new policies and staffing changes.

Districts also need to develop procedures for identifying organizationally weak and disorganized schools that actively create low-student performance (Balfanz, in press) and design a system of supports and oversights to ensure sustained progress. For many secondary schools, twice-a-year "walk-arounds" by administrators and other similar monitoring systems are not

sufficient to ensure that major problems are identified and addressed in a timely fashion. Similar, most of the reconstitution strategies that have been used in various cities and states have been insufficient to turn around troubled schools. Almost all of these reconstitution efforts have focused on either appointing an outside team (which visits the school for a short duration of time) or creating an internal school team to come up with a reform plan and/or a set of benchmarks which are then monitored. The problem is that truly chaotic and organizationally weak schools do not need a plan. They need active and sustained support and assistance. In District 2 in New York City, for example, active support in the form of extensive professional development is offered, but even here the district administrators admit that there is a sub-group of schools they feel are not ready for reform and that the district does not have the capacity to assist (Burney & Elmore, 1997). Districts, however, cannot ignore "difficult-to-reform" schools. This is one area where external whole school reform designs might be strategically used.

The other area of fundamental support that districts need to work on is adequate time for teachers to work collaboratively to bring about needed reforms (Adelman, Walking Eagle, & Hargreaves, 1997). Teaching for active engagement, which is at the heart of good instruction, is an exhausting process. It is very difficult to do this for five periods a day, every day. Intensive teaching demands also leave teachers with little energy for necessary organizational reforms and supports. Yet, having enough time and energy to work collaboratively and create a community of adults who work together to ensure that the school environment is supportive of high achievement is critical to systematic success (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Thus, school districts will need to look hard at finding ways to provide teachers with more time during the school day. Instead of decreasing class size, for example, it might be better at the secondary level to decrease teacher's course loads. Middle school mathematics teachers in the U.S. have much higher course loads than their counterparts in Japan who, in exchange for large classes, are provided time for collaborative work during the school day (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996).

Using Data to Support Strong Learning Environments

Districts and schools must learn how to use data effectively if they are going to see systematic and sustained improvement in academic achievement. At the classroom level, teachers and administrators need to be trained and supported in the use of curriculum-based diagnostic tests and assessments to quickly and routinely identify students in need of extra help (Slavin, Madden, Dolan, & Wasik, 1996). At the school and district level, measures that capture the number of classrooms in which students are achieving a year or more of growth in each of the major subject areas need to become the standard by which progress in measured. These quantitative data, however, need to be accompanied by the systematic collection of school-level contextual data which provides principals and district officials with an understanding of school- and classroom-level dynamics behind the achievement data (Burney & Elmore, 1997; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993).

Districts need to use this data to build and test theories on how schools improve and under what circumstances whole school reform is achieved (Palmaffy, 1998). Too often, district personnel adopt an almost magical approach to school reform. Absent any grounded theory on why a particular program or reform might or might not work, they end up simplistically lumping reform efforts into two types of programs—those that have "worked" and should be scaled up

quickly and those that have "failed" and should be abandoned. These summary judgments are usually impressionistic, often anecdotally driven, and seldom based on a data-rich, deep analysis of the reform effort. As a result, promising programs are at times abandoned too early, while others that work only in a particular context are rapidly spread to less hospitable environments without the supports they need to succeed. In short, little attention is paid to critical contextual factors that are essential to strong implementation. As a consequence, little long-term knowledge on the essential nature of school reform is gained (Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993). This lack of contextual knowledge is at the heart of much of the policy churn identified by Hess (1999).

Guiding Question #4: How Can Districts Build An Infrastructure to Sustain Reform?

The question that remains is, How can districts develop the capacity to implement facilitated instructional programs, provide organizational supports, and use data wisely in a coordinated effort to systematically build and sustain strong learning environments in every school and classroom? This is a tall order. To accomplish this, Bryk (1998) argues that school districts may need to create new (or partner with existing) independent organizations whose only mission is to spread and sustain effective reform:

> Much of this might best be accomplished through an array of new quasi-public enterprise, whose development would be stimulated by Board action, but whose day-to-day activities would not be directly controlled by a central office. For these reasons, we refer to this capacity building as a need for extra-school infrastructure to promote improvement. (p. 18)

For example, the Chicago Schools Consortium worked with the School District of Chicago to collect and analyze critical data on school reform efforts. Some other examples might include the role played by Research for Action and the Philadelphia Education Fund in the Children Achieving Reform Agenda in Philadelphia and the University of Memphis and Johns Hopkins University in the school reform efforts in Memphis. These independent organizations have played the useful role of a critical but constructive friend providing research and evaluation of district initiatives.

It is our belief that a more intensive and proactive five-way partnership among schools, districts, outside design teams, local reform institutions, and foundations will be needed to propel improvements, particularly in some urban locales. The goal of this partnership would be to build and sustain the district support systems needed to enable broad-based achievement gains throughout the district. In our experience, each of these partners has a critically important role to play in the systematic creation and continuation of high-performing urban schools.

School-level buy-in is essential to any long-term chance of success. True reform will involve fundamental changes in the behavior of teachers, administrators, and students. This cannot be done against their will. Thus, it is essential that efforts be made to ensure that teachers, staff, and other stakeholders see that the reforms are in their best interests and are given the opportunity to customize them to local needs.

On the other hand, for most teachers, schools (and urban schools in particular) have been in a continual state of reform throughout their entire careers, yet little has changed (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Thus, the skepticism that meets claims of even more reform is well earned. As a result, the growing mantra that a school cannot be reformed until it "is ready" is a recipe for continual inaction in many urban schools. Although initial buy-in from a majority of a school's faculty is essential, it is unclear whether this initial support at the secondary level needs to be as high as the 80 percent level that some states are requesting in their CSRD (Obey-Porter) competitions (M. Hornbeck, 1998). Districts, design teams, and foundations may need to gamble that for some low-performing secondary schools, a strong model that is initially supported by a majority of the faculty can—with sufficient support during implementation—win and sustain full faculty support over time.

As this monograph has attempted to show, school districts have a critical role to play because, without their agency, systematic and sustained reform will not occur. From both a legal and political point of view, school districts are the controlling agency. Schorr (1997) points out that one of the main reasons that successful pilot programs seldom lead to systematic change is that they are usually developed and operated outside of the rules and customs of the dominant authority. This enables them to "break the rules" and innovate, but it also virtually guarantees that these programs will not have a large-scale impact, because supportive school district involvement is central to any reform effort that aims to make a long-term and broad-based impact.

Design teams (i.e., developers and disseminators) of external whole school reform models can provide technical expertise and research-based solutions. Through these efforts, they can build district capacity for larger school reform by (a) demonstrating how whole schools can be effectively reformed, (b) directly involving district personnel in the efforts, (c) identifying the district policies that will need to be changed to support the widespread adoption of effective practices, and (d) working with the district to establish the infrastructure (featuring continual professional development, in-classroom implementation support, organizational assistance, and productive use of data) that is needed to support and sustain the large-scale diffusion of effective practices.

Design teams do not currently have the capacity to directly reform every school in need, but they can work with a critical nucleus of schools, which should include some of the lowest performing schools in a district. Success in these schools will create the hope that any school can be reformed and the expectation that every school should be characterized by strong learning environments.

How outside design teams will be used by a school district will vary by the size, locale, and nature of the school district. In all cases, however, it will be important to adhere to some key insights that can be gleaned from the literature on the diffusion of innovations. The intervention should begin with a relatively small number of well-supported pilot schools whose faculty members are highly committed to reform. The outside design model should then be modified to meet local circumstances and needs. Success during the pilot stage can then be used to recruit a wider sample of schools for a field test. At this stage, the outside design team should work with the district to build the infrastructure for wide-scale diffusion of the key organizational and

instructional reforms and supports and identify district policies that help and hinder the reform. The district can then provide assistance to implement effective whole school reform to all schools in need. It is also at this time that some reluctant schools may need a push from the district to adopt effective practices. The design team and the district must resist the temptation to scale up initial success before the necessary support systems are in place and teachers are convinced that the reforms have improved achievement in schools that are similar to their own.

Local reform organizations (e.g., education funds, business roundtables, and local educational reform groups) have at least three essential roles to play in the partnership. First, they can provide outside design teams with the knowledge and networks they need to adapt their model to local circumstances and develop a strong relationship with the local school district. Second, they can help nurture the development phase of the initiative by providing a neutral forum to bring together the schools, the district, and the design team to share ideas, improve implementation, and figure out mutually acceptable ways to respond to the concerns of each partner. They can also play the role of critical friend to all the parties and help with the ongoing evaluation of the initiative. Finally, and perhaps most crucially, because they are an established local presence, they can help institutionalize the reforms and serve as a stable guiding hand through the inevitable change of school district personnel.

Foundations need to be the venture capitalists in the partnership. They need to play a matchmaking role by linking up school districts that have specific needs with design teams that have the skills and experience to help them. In particular, if the goal is to develop the infrastructure needed to support broad-based achievement gains in urban areas, then it is essential that districts form partnerships with design teams whose models can help create the learning environments outlined at the start of this paper and who have direct experience providing implementation support and professional development to teachers in urban environments. Financial support from foundations will also be critical in the initial development and infrastructure-building phases. School districts are conservative bureaucratic organizations that often are underfunded. They may not embrace even the most cogently presented and research-based reform unless it is supported by additional funding. Like any venture capital, however, this funding should come with strict conditions: that (a) the district actively supports and actively communicates its support for the partnership between the outside design team(s) and a cadre of district schools, and (b) the district creates the infrastructure and support systems needed to scale up successful interventions and achieve broad-based achievement gains. Finally, foundations should support third-party evaluation of the partnership in order to create a knowledge base that will inform both ongoing and future efforts.

A prototype of this five-way partnership has been created in Philadelphia between the Talent Development Middle School Model, the Philadelphia Education Fund, the Pew Charitable Trust, the School District of Philadelphia, and seven middle schools that serve high-poverty populations. The initial results of this partnership have been very promising (Mac Iver et al., in press; Balfanz, Mac Iver, & Ryan, 1999). Strong, broad-based achievement gains have been attained in the first two schools to implement the full model. The next step will be to build the infrastructure and create the materials needed for large-scale dissemination of the organizational components, instructional materials, and teacher and student supports that have created strong learning environments at these schools (Wilson & Corbett 1999; Balfanz, Mac Iver, & Ryan,

1999; Plank & Young, 2000). As part of its national field test, the Talent Development Middle School Model will replicate this partnership in three more school districts over the next two years.

The participating partners in the Philadelphia prototype are playing a more active role than has traditionally been played by foundations, design teams, and local reform institutions in districts' reform efforts. Without this kind of active involvement, however, it is unclear whether systematic improvement in school districts is possible. The past 30 years of research and our own experience indicate that left to their own devices, the safest recourse for high-poverty schools and for mid-level district officials serving these schools is to embrace reform at a rhetorical level, but to do very little in practice—making it easy to place the blame for failure on students and the community (Palmaffy, 1998).

The most viable alternatives to the five-way partnerships proposed in this essay are school choice and court- or state-ordered mandates. School choice may provide some students with access to stronger learning environments (Peterson & Hassel, 1998), but its ability to systematically improve academic achievement at the district level remains unknown. Court- and state-ordered mandates do not have a strong track record of creating powerful learning environments at the school and classroom level (Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Wilson & Rossman, 1993). The next generation of state-ordered court mandates (such as those issued in New Jersey) might have a more profound effect (Firestone, Goertz, & Natriello, 1997) by emphasizing specific programs, but state reconstitution efforts have not proved to be an easy or effective recourse.

Three underappreciated facts should be acknowledged in any attempt to systematically improve academic achievement at the district level. First, many secondary schools, particularly urban schools that serve large numbers of high-poverty children, are performing very poorly. The majority of middle school students in large, northern, industrial cities, such as Baltimore and Philadelphia, graduate from 8th grade two to three grade levels behind the national average in the major subject areas, then attend high schools where most of the students drop out. Second, the number and concentration of poorly performing secondary schools varies by place—some districts have only a few low-performing secondary schools; other districts, often those heavily populated with poor and minority students, have a high percentage of low-performing schools. Third, much of this poor performance is either actively created or passively permitted. It is not simply the result of schools, districts, and states doing the best job they can under difficult circumstances. Poorly performing middle and high schools and the school districts and states in which they are located often directly but inadvertently contribute to the low performance of their students (Balfanz, 1997, in press).

As sobering as these facts are, they are also cause for hope. Targeted and sustained reform efforts aimed at creating strong learning environments in every urban secondary school in need have the potential to transform the opportunity for success for a substantial portion of the nation's poor and minority students. The nation's 25 largest cities, for example, educate about one-third of the Hispanics and one-quarter of the African American students in the United States (Orfield & Eaton, 1996). An analysis of the Common Core Data indicates that there are approximately 230 broken and dysfunctional high schools with dropout rates of 50 percent or

higher in these cities (Balfanz & Legters, 1998). Our experience in Baltimore and Philadelphia also indicates that for every broken high school, there are two or three low-performing feeder middle schools. This means there are on the order of 750-1,000 secondary schools in dire need of assistance in the 25 largest cities. This is not a small number, but assisting them is within the bounds of human agency. A concentrated and sustained effort over the next 10-15 years has the potential to cut off one of the major pipelines to the underclass.

How do we get there? In attempting to answer this question, this paper makes the following points:

1. There is an emerging consensus on the characteristics of learning achievement across all students. But there is little agreement or literature on what school districts can and should do to help create and sustain these environments in all their schools.

2. There is widespread agreement that school districts should make obtaining high levels of academic achievement in all schools and classrooms their top priority. There is also agreement that two important steps districts must take to reach this goal are (1) publishing or adopting content and performance standards that clarify the knowledge and skills that all students are expected to learn, and (2) developing an accountability framework that takes a value-added approach to measuring each school-s progress toward this goal.

3. Relatively speaking, adopting content and performance standards and developing an accountability framework are easy steps. A hard step is figuring out how school districts can provide all of their schools in need with the support and direction they require to create strong learning environments in all classrooms.

4. Although decentralized school districts and site-based management have many merits, no evidence suggests that this approach in and of itself will lead to wide-scale improvement. Schools are like small businesses. Left to their own devices, most schools will not be able to overcome the obstacles that cause most small businesses to fail, including lack of resources, lack of technical knowledge, and an unstable operating environment.

5. Externally developed whole school reform models, outside contractors, and reform networks can be used by districts as powerful tools for realizing reform. However, there are not enough fully developed and demonstrably effective external models, contractors, and networks to provide all—or even most—of the schools in need with the level of sustained support they require to realize broad-based achievement gains.

6. As a result, school districts have to play an active role in building an innovative support system. At a minimum, they need to (a) provide teachers with ongoing access to professional development activities that help them learn to use effective standards-based instructional programs and that offer in-classroom implementation support from respected peers in a non-evaluatory setting, (b) identify and provide schools in need with sustained organizational assistance, and (c) find ways to

effectively use data to create and sustain the formation of strong learning environments. Districts also must evaluate existing policies regarding budget, staffing, scheduling, teacher advancement, and the use of time to ensure that they support rather than hinder reform efforts.

7. Some districts will be able to build the appropriate support structure on their own. Most will need help. We propose that one way to offer this help is through a five-way partnership among schools, school districts, outside design teams, local reform organizations, and foundations. Each partner plays a vital role in creating strong, innovative district support systems aimed at enabling broad-based achievement gains.

In summary, the local school district is the agency through which reform efforts should flow to achieve success. A wise and informed effort that calls on all available resources and techniques will need to be made in each school district. The district will need to learn how to apply the reform effectively to local conditions. No two districts may do this in exactly the same way, but in each, a sustained effort must be made to provide schools with the support they need to create the conditions outlined at the start of this essay that result in strong learning environments. Anything less will leave too many students without the education they deserve.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Students who are considered to be at-risk come from a variety of socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. They also have differing levels of ability. They can be homeless students; students who are teen parents; students with physical or mental disabilities; American Indian, immigrant, migrant ,or refugee students, students who are neglected, delinquent or at-risk of dropping out of school; students who live in single-parent homes or live with other relatives; or students who live in high-poverty areas. Further, any student can become "at-risk" at any time.

What is true of all students is especially true for students at-risk of failing in school. All students flourish in an environment that meets their needs, reflects their background and interests, and values them as individuals. But for at-risk students, these issues are much more critical.

As the authors of the papers presented in this publication collectively argue, schools must work to establish the conditions that are necessary to maximize students' opportunities to learn. These essential ingredients, which might be identified as "opportunity-to-learn standards," help ensure that all students have access to the resources, support, and experiences they need to meet academic standards. The papers presented at McREL's At-Risk Diversity Roundtable, along with ideas shared during discussions at the roundtable, suggest at least three areas educators can focus on that will increase the likelihood of success for students considered to be at risk:

1. Creating a motivating and supportive learning environment
2. Ensuring that schooling reflects students' backgrounds and perspectives
3. Building an infrastructure that supports students' success

Creating a Motivating and Supportive Learning Environment

A key to success in school is motivation and opportunity. Without one or other, students are not likely to succeed. Fortunately there is much that educators can do to create a supportive environment that enhances students' motivation to learn and promotes high levels of academic achievement for students from all backgrounds. The following practices are among those that educators can follow to improve the education of at-risk students in a standards-based system.

Fostering An Environment that Expects the Best

Strong, personal teacher-student relationships are key to students' success. But in order for at-risk students to meet high academic standards, these students need relationships with adults who hold and demonstrate high expectations for them and who help them achieve their

highest potential. In addition, teachers, counselors, administrators, teacher aides, and other adults can greatly contribute to students' success by teaching them to set high aspirations for themselves, identify clear goals, and take the steps needed to achieve these goals.

Creating Small Learning Communities

A school that is organized into small learning communities helps students in a variety of ways. In smaller learning units, students have more opportunities to build interpersonal relationships that are cohesive and meaningful, to participate in learning, and to be noticed for their unique talents and contributions. Smaller learning communities are particularly useful in the higher grades and in schools with large populations. Students typically find that it's easier to feel connected in a smaller group, to have empathy for others, to become more aware of how their behavior affects others, to learn to develop better habits of learning, and to develop shared responsibility for one another's learning.

Ensuring That Schooling Reflects Students' Backgrounds and Perspectives

As Dr. Gay argues, to improve the achievement of at-risk students, educators must change the way they teach and interact with students. Specifically, teachers must focus their teaching on students' needs and not on their own personal passions. There are a number of general practices that teachers can use to help them create learning environments that better reflect students' perspectives and backgrounds.

Connecting Learning to Students' Experiences

A critical component of students' success is a high-quality, standards-based curriculum that is aligned with local standards and assessment instruments. But for at-risk students, this curriculum must also be culturally and personally relevant. Incorporating diversity into the curriculum, instruction, and assessments means that educators must do much more than become "aware" of students' differences. They must strive to use students' cultural background, experiences, and orientations as instructional tools for increasing students' achievement.

Modifying the learning environment so it is more culturally and personally relevant for students should occur in a number of ways and at a number of levels. For starters, teachers should include more multicultural images, artifacts, and experiences into the curriculum and into instruction. But they must also strive to understand the communication patterns, learning styles, participation styles, and other factors that influence students' learning and create learning experiences that honor these differences whenever possible. This may mean varying the format of learning activities to incorporate more affective responses, motion, and movement or recognizing that not all students are comfortable making eye contact with their teachers. It may also mean using alternative methods to assess whether students are paying attention, such as observing students' behavior or asking students to summarize key discussion points orally or in writing.

Students' learning is enhanced when content and experiences are "nested in their own frames of reference" (Gay, p. 11). This is particularly true of concepts and other abstract ideas, which typically are challenging for students. But teachers can build bridges between abstract concepts and real-life experiences for students by using familiar examples, illustrations, vignettes, scenarios, and anecdotes for concepts, ideas, facts, principles, and skills. Connecting school learning to students' life experiences is a powerful way to improve achievement.

Adapting Classroom Discourse to Students' Needs

Another critical practice for increasing the chances of success for at-risk students is adapting classroom discourse to encourage more student participation. For example, it's important to provide appropriate wait-time for students, especially recent-immigrant students or second language learners. Children whose first language is not English may require more wait-time because of the processes involved in shifting from a native language to a second language. In addition, teachers should consider the time they spend informing, explaining, and demonstrating. The amount of time teachers spend talking can be overwhelming for at-risk students, who may have short attention spans and use different language patterns or different vocabulary words to verbally express their ideas.

Talking less and encouraging students to talk more helps to engage students in the learning process and increase their academic achievement. Teachers should consider encouraging participation and dialogue through cooperative learning activities that give students an opportunity to work with their peers and through multimedia presentations, role plays, and simulations. Active teaching strategies such as these enhance students' motivation to learn.

Building an Infrastructure that Supports Students' Success

Dr. Mac Iver and Dr. Balfanz maintain that to improve the academic achievement of at-risk students in a standards-based system, "districts need to develop systems that fundamentally transform the support that teachers receive, the instructional programs they use, the organizational assistance provided to schools, and the use of data within the district" (see p. 50). Some of the changes in practice recommended include the following:

Using a Value-added Approach to Measuring Student Progress

One action school districts can take to increase the achievement of at-risk students in a standards-based system is to adopt an accountability framework that takes a "value-added approach" to measuring progress. Most schools and districts historically have compared their overall average student score to other schools and to national norms. A value-added system, on the other hand, focuses much more attention on the increase in student achievement from year to year.

Creating a Culture of Learning

The goal of professional development should be to create an environment in which ongoing learning is the norm, rather than the exception, for every member of the school community. Thus, a professional development program must not be a series of disconnected one-day in-service trainings. Teacher study groups and multi-day workshops that give teachers an opportunity to study and apply concepts in depth are much more effective. Professional development experiences should also be embedded into the fabric of teachers' daily lives and not reserved for separate in-service sessions, which can be very far removed from the classroom. These learning opportunities should serve as a forum for teachers to discuss ideas, strategies, successes, and failures related to modifying their daily practices. Teachers should have opportunities to critically examine successful strategies used by others and to tailor these approaches to the needs of their own students.

In addition, and perhaps most important, a comprehensive, ongoing professional development program must be directly linked to students' learning needs. It must be centered around a process that continually assesses students' learning and designs learning experiences for the educators who work with these populations. It is vitally important for educators to have frequent, meaningful opportunities to learn the knowledge and develop the skills they need to work with at-risk students.

Building Capacity

In order for schools and districts to contribute to the increased achievement of at-risk students, the system as a whole must develop the capacity to sustain a successful program. For example, training lead teachers in each subject area who are readily available to assist their colleagues helps schools to develop and maintain their capacity. Curriculum coaches can also be used to provide ongoing, in-class assistance to teachers. This assistance can include troubleshooting, peer coaching, team teaching, and advice and encouragement. These coaches can also help other educators understand students' background and culture and apply this knowledge as they design and use instructional and assessment strategies. Schools that have recent-immigrant or second language learners may also need to hire bilingual staff. Students are more likely to succeed when they have people with whom they can communicate in their native language about academic standards and about challenges they are encountering.

Developing Relationships with Parents and Communities

Schools in which at-risk students are successful are those that have developed and capitalized on relationships with parents as well as with community-based agencies, businesses, and other organizations. These partnerships have provided financial support, given students opportunities for internships and employment, paved the way for students to pursue post-secondary studies, and helped schools better respond to students' needs. Relationships such as these typically lead to increased dialogue between school and home. Involving parents and other community members in school initiatives and decision-making processes enhances the learning of at-risk students.

Examining Policies and Allocating Resources

In order for educators to help at-risk students meet high academic standards, schools and districts must have policies in place that support the attainment of identified goals. This may mean adopting new polices, strengthening current policies, or waiving particular policies for schools with special needs. In addition to strong, coordinated policies, it is important to ensure that human and financial resources are allocated to make needed changes. Schools and districts may need to consider creative approaches to combining resources to support professional development, curriculum design, retention of dedicated staff, and a range of other strategies that increase the likelihood that at-risk students will succeed.

A Final Comment

The success of at-risk students is a shared responsibility. Teachers, administrators, district assessment personnel, educators responsible for training current as well as new educators, state department of education staff, and educational laboratory staff all have a role to play in supporting this worthwhile and necessary effort. Although this endeavor is complex and will undoubtedly require educators to make many changes, addressing the unique needs of at-risk students in a standards-based system should be one of our top priorities. Focused effort and commitment are necessary if we are serious about preparing *all* students to succeed in the 21st century.